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WESTFIELD.

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WESTFIELD

A VIEW OF HOME LIFE DURING THE AMERICAN WAR.

EDINBURGH
EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS
1866.

TO

THOMAS HUGHES, ESQ., M.P.

WHOSE KINDLY WORDS

OF SYMPATHY AND FRIENDSHIP

ARE REMEMBERED

WITH GRATEFUL AFFECTION

IN THE

HOMES OF THE WESTERN WORLD.

603122

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CHAPTER I.

THREE HOUSEHOLDS OF WESTFIELD.

OVER a quiet little country town, which lies far away toward the setting sun, the first snow of the season was falling. Seemingly intent upon watching the feathery flakes as they fluttered down through the still evening air, Virginia Alston had been standing beside the window for a quarter of an hour, when she became aware of a tall figure rapidly advancing along the deserted street. In an instant she was at the front door, in time to open it, just as her brother put his hand into his pocket in search of his latch-key. 'Always ready, Virginia,' was his greeting; 'what a model wife you will make for some fortunate fellow one of these days!'

Virginia made him a mock courtesy.

'Thank you; but it would have been a prettier compliment had you called me a model sister. A virtue *in esse* is rather better than one *in posse*.'

'So it is. How cold it is growing! there will be capital sleighing to-morrow if this goes on.'

The speaker opened the door of the parlour. Its only occupant was a pale, delicate-looking woman, sitting in an easy-chair with a shawl round her shoulders, her whole air being that of a semi-invalid. At the sound of her son's voice she looked up with a sudden brightening of her countenance, and as Virginia, for whom the window had lost its attraction, drew near, and seated herself in the corner of the sofa beside him, it was easy to see that to these two women Henry Alston was the light of the eyes.

'Any letters to-day?' The invariable first question in a town where every man was his own postman.

'No letters; but a very young-ladyish, rose-coloured, violet-scented note for you, which Miss Emily Osborne sent over to the office to-day with a great many apologies, and would I be so good, et cetera, et cetera?'

Virginia's lip curled unmistakably as the dainty missive was tossed into her lap.

'And pray, when did you undertake to fetch and carry for Miss Emily Osborne?'

'For my sister, some twenty years ago;' was the reply, with a marked emphasis on the first three words.

'Rags, of course,' said Virginia contemptuously,

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glancing at the offending note. 'Will I lend her the pattern of my black silk sacque? Stuff! she could get it from a dozen people nearer at hand. I wonder if she expects me to send it by you? The idea of my giving the fashions to the banker's daughter!'

'Why not?' asked Henry, in evident amusement.

'Because dress is not the chief business of my existence, as it seems to be of hers. But this precious epistle must wait till I light the lamp. I can't see to read such a microscopic hand. I suppose she thinks it feminine to write in that style.'

While Virginia busied herself over the lamp, Mrs. Alston ventured upon a word of remonstrance, in the fretful tone of one whose conversation was principally composed of such words.

'I am sure I don't see why you have taken such a dislike to Emily Osborne; she appears to me a very sweet girl.'

'Oh! sweet; I daresay. I don't know that she has ever had anything to make her sour. But it is faint praise to sum up a woman's attractions in a quality shared in common with the contents of the sugar-bowl.'

'Possibly,' said Henry; 'yet one could not get on very pleasantly without a little of the sugar of life.'

'Better than without its salt.'

'Yes, if the choice lay between the two.'

'It does sometimes.'

Again Virginia took up the note, but in an instant she exclaimed—'Henry! is this possible? Only listen: "I heard to-day from a most reliable source that Aurora Bartlett is engaged to Mr. Stanley." I don't believe a word of it; it is all Westfield gossip.'

'Ah, Miss Emily has forestalled me; it is not Westfield gossip, but a veritable fact. The doctor told me to-day; and it strikes me as an excellent match.'

'O Henry! But you never did appreciate Aurora.'

'Excuse me, I think I do appreciate her; I will congratulate Stanley with all my heart.'

'Well you may. It will not be so easy to congratulate her.'

'Virginia, I thought you above listening to scandal.'

'I hope I am. I was not thinking of the tales that used to keep the town in talk. Mr. Stanley may be a good farmer, a sensible man—probably superior to nine-tenths of the Westfield people; but that does not prove him Aurora's equal. To think of such a woman degenerating into a mere farmer's wife, burying her talents in the poultry-yard and pig-sty—it is positively exasperating. I thought I knew one woman who did not

look upon marriage as the end and aim of her existence, but it seems I was mistaken. We are all alike ready to make a hero and an idol of any man, however undeserving; there is no trusting any one of us. Really I should not be surprised after this if I were to be caught making a fool of myself some day.'

'Virginia, I wish you would refrain from the use of such exaggerated language,' said Mrs. Alston; 'it is excessively unfeminine.'

'I never set up for a model of feminine propriety.'

'No, and I am sorry you could not.'

'I am not sorry. I can't change my nature, mother, any more than the Ethiopian his skin or the leopard his spots; it is useless to torture myself in the vain attempt.'

'You can at least give up the habit of quoting Scripture in that irreverent manner.' And in serious displeasure Mrs. Alston left the room.

'O dear!' sighed Virginia, throwing herself back in her chair, 'I wonder how a duck feels that has a hen for its mother!'

'Virginia,' said her brother, in a tone of grave remonstrance.

'Nonsense, Henry, I am not forgetting either duty or affection, but there is a difference in our very

natures, which nothing can bridge over. A hen must be a hen, and a duck a duck, to the end of the chapter.'

There was no denying the truth of such an assertion, and Henry made no reply until his sister said—

'Don't put on that look. I am made to have quite enough of the naughty-child feeling without your aid.'

Then the look gave way to a half-sad smile.

'Are you not a naughty child sometimes in spite of your five-and-twenty years?'

'And if I am, perpetual fault-finding will not cure me. You have no idea how exasperating it is to be caught up and criticised at every turn. And it is rather painful to feel that you are a constant trial to some member of your own family; that is the secret of my sympathy with the aforesaid duck.'

Henry laughed. 'You can give your friend a humane suggestion for the management of her poultry-yard.'

'Aurora! Don't speak of her; everything has gone wrong to-day, and that is the last straw breaking the camel's back.'

'Poor old camel!' said Henry, taking her hand and patting it caressingly, 'what were the other straws?'

'Oh, nothing you need be burdened with; little vexations belonging to a woman's lot! If I had a "*sweet*"

temper, I daresay I should not mind; but being what I am, they make me desperately cross.'

'And is that the reason why you were so savage upon that poor little butterfly Miss Emily?'

'I dare say.'

Mrs. Alston coming in just then, Virginia changed the subject, but for the remainder of the evening she was in a much more amiable mood.

Meanwhile Emily Osborne was quite unconscious of having given any cause of offence, and could not have been made to understand Virginia's state of mind. It was not her fault that nearly all the young men of Westfield were at her feet, and she was innocent of any design to add Henry Alston to the number. It was pleasant to be loved, pleasant to be admired, so thought Emily, as she looked into her mirror and saw the bright, pretty picture reflected there; and she knew no reason why she should not rejoice in all the pleasant things which had fallen to her lot in life. Happy herself, she liked to make others happy, and, ready to oblige, she did not hesitate to ask the little favours she would have been glad to bestow. And so it came to pass that, while she was a general favourite, two or three people began to suspect her of deep-laid designs to win the admiration she seemed to enjoy so much. First of

these was Virginia Alston, whose uncompromising temper and strong will had nothing in common with a nature like Emily's. Weak and frivolous it seemed in her eyes, and she had no patience with those who were captivated by the winning manner which she despised.

But, like most strong-minded women, Virginia was aware that there is an attraction in a certain kind of weakness, and she was terribly afraid that her brother might not be proof against it. So Emily's little innocent note aroused her indignation as if it had been a trap laid for Henry; and she was only soothed by his words convincing her that 'Miss Emily' had fully succeeded in impressing him with a sense of the light and trifling nature of her charms.

No 'butterfly' would ever win her brother's heart, of that she felt reasonably sure.

Henry Alston was right in his prophecy. The next day there was capital sleighing, and from an early hour in the morning that cheeriest of all cheery sounds, the ringing of the sleigh-bells, came echoing upon the frosty air. Every one who possessed a sleigh had it out; from Mr. Osborne the banker, whose wife and daughter, enveloped in costly furs and half-buried in buffalo-robes, were the envy of many less fortunate

people as they dashed along in their pretty swan-like vehicle, down through various and sundry styles of equipage to the common wooden box fitted with seats and fixed upon runners, the triumphant achievement of some enterprising boy determined not to lose the chance of a sleigh-ride.

Farther north, where the snow lies upon the ground for long months at a time, and where the sleigh is the only means of locomotion during the winter, the enjoyment can scarcely be the same that is realized where the pleasure is a rare one, eagerly watched for, coming at intervals, and lasting but a few days.

On this day the entire population of Westfield were making the most of the opportunity. Even the doctor, catching the general infection, had ordered his sleigh instead of his buggy, and had taken the delighted children to school before beginning his round of visits, promising moreover to call for them and give them a longer ride in the afternoon, 'if the thaw does not come, and nobody is very ill.'

'The Doctor.' I have called him by the title given him by common consent in Westfield. Not that Dr. Bartlett was the only physician in the town: on two other doors beside his in the principal street were two names followed by M.D. in letters large and distinct

enough to be read by the most careless passer. But no one thought of disputing his claim to the title,—not even the two young medical gentlemen themselves; nor, stranger still, their wives, who might be supposed to be jealous of any such distinction. His kindness of heart and generosity of disposition placing him beyond the reach of envy or suspicion, even as his acknowledged learning and skill had long since made comparisons impossible, he was the friend and counsellor of both the young doctors; and the trio lived on the most amicable terms, without those jealousies and heart-burnings not unfrequently found among members of their honourable profession.

While the doctor's sleigh was gliding hither and thither on its errands of mercy, the doctor's wife and sister were sitting at work in a bright sunny room, whose windows to the south looked out upon the main street, at the east end of which the house was situated.

Very unlike were the two women. The one who was standing at a table cutting out work was short and rather stout, with a quick, energetic manner, proclaiming at a glance the model housewife—a good face, neither plain nor pretty, but full of intelligence, and lighted up by a pair of keen, sparkling black eyes, whose searching glance would detect in an instant

a chance speck of dust wherever it might hide itself away. The other, sitting at a sewing-machine, whose busy click had interrupted all conversation, was one of those persons whom no one can pass by unnoticed. The tall elegant figure showed to advantage even in that posture, set off by a simple grey merino dress, with a bow of blue ribbon fastening the white linen collar; and there was something striking in the contour of the small beautifully-shaped head, with its golden-brown hair drawn back from the face, and twisted into a seemingly careless knot, over which the ends of the waving curls fell in a graceful shower. When its owner looked up with a pair of large soft hazel eyes, the most noticeable feature in a face radiant with health and happiness, no one could see the sunny brightness of her expression and fail to feel the appropriateness of her name—Aurora.

'Have you anything ready for me, Harriet?' she asked, as she laid aside the finished seam, through which the marvellous little machine had sent its lightning stitches.

'No, I believe not. But you can lay some of these hems if you have nothing else to do.'

And then as Mrs. Bartlett's nimble fingers plied the scissors, cutting and snipping here and there with

dexterous quickness and unfailing precision, she entered upon a conversation to which for some days she had been making up her mind. However, she approached it rather cautiously at first, though the caution did not last beyond the first question or two.

'Have the Stanleys come home?'

'I suppose so; they were expected last night.'

'They will be over to see you to-day probably.'

Aurora said nothing, but her colour deepened a little.

'That is,' continued Mrs. Bartlett, '*if* they approve. Girls of their age are apt to have opinions of their own on such matters.'

Still no reply; Aurora busied herself with her work.

'I am sure, Aurora, you have my best wishes for your happiness, but I can't help feeling that you are running a great risk; and you know I always have to say just what I think.'

'I would not have you do otherwise where I am concerned,' was the quiet answer; though inwardly Aurora was a little afraid that something was coming in which there were others also concerned.

'I always did think it a most unfortunate relation; though not in the way the story-books represent. It is the stepmother I pity, not the children, and I am very sorry—'

'Not for me, Harriet,' said Aurora quickly and a little proudly, then, trying to laugh it off, 'I can't allow you to waste your sympathies.'

'Of course it is natural that you should not see the danger now,' continued her friendly adviser. 'But I have seen enough to convince me that there is something radically impracticable in the nature of the tie, positively destructive of affection.'

'There I think you are entirely wrong. Waiving all reference to myself' (and Aurora fancied she was speaking of an abstract principle, a thing impossible under the circumstances, every word that she said being the index to her own feelings), 'any woman loving a man enough to become his wife must have an affection for his children, and if so, she will soon win their love, provided they are left to her influence.'

'I was not speaking of theories, but of facts,' said Mrs. Bartlett, rather provokingly. 'However, in this case Julia and May can scarcely be called children; they are too old to be managed like younger girls.'

'I shall not attempt to manage them.'

Something in Aurora's tone might have sounded a note of warning to any one less determined than Mrs. Bartlett; but it was one of her fixed principles not to turn back from anything she had once undertaken, and she went on—

'I don't want to give offence, Aurora, but I cannot conscientiously refrain from speaking my mind.'

'Oh, well, Harriet, if that is all, I will absolve you from any responsibility. I will not ask your sanction, and then you can feel that no blame attaches to you. Arthur's approval is enough for me.'

'Oh, Arthur,' said Mrs. Bartlett, 'you could always make him see with your eyes.'

'If ever you hear me speak in that contemptuous tone of my husband—' were the words on Aurora's lips, but she wisely restrained them, and made another effort for peace.

'He has a very good pair of his own,' she said quietly, 'like a dear good brother as he is; he sees and rejoices in our happiness.'

'Well, I hope you may find it that; but according to all accounts a happy wife will be something new in the old house on the hill.'

In her momentary vexation Mrs. Bartlett had gone a little too far, presuming upon her privilege of speaking her mind. Aurora started; but controlling herself with a strong effort, she folded and laid aside her work, then looking her sister-in-law full in the face, she said—'Harriet, you must be well aware that this is no subject for discussion between us. You have been a sister to me for years, and we shall not quarrel now; but no

other woman living should dare to speak to me as you have done to-day.'

And waiting for no reply, she left the room. Upstairs she found her own fire nearly gone out, but she gathered together the few red coals, threw on two or three sticks of wood, and very soon there was a cheerful blaze, before which she sat down to take herself to task for having been so much disturbed by the conversation which had just taken place.

'How often have I resolved not to mind what Harriet says when she is in one of her provoking moods!' So she began; but argue against it as she might, she felt the sting of the carelessly spoken words more deeply perhaps than the speaker would have thought possible. All her bright visions were overclouded by the fear that after all there might be room for the doubt her sister-in-law had expressed in regard to the two girls. Harriet's last dart had simply recoiled on herself, as spiteful remarks are apt to do; but the thought of coming between Mr. Stanley and his daughters, and causing a breach in the happiness and affection existing between them, was one that could not be lightly dismissed.

Not very long were these painful questionings to go on; there came an interruption to them as well as to Mrs. Bartlett's self-complacent musings on the resolu-

tion with which she had persisted in a painful duty. Down the street came the merry jingling of the bells of a sleigh, nearer and nearer, till they suddenly stopped as the horses gave a final toss of their heads and drew up at the doctor's gate, and looking out, Mrs. Bartlett saw Mr. Stanley helping his daughters to alight. Now, just at that moment her future brother-in-law was the very last person whom she would have wished to meet; for though her conscience was not a little callous in regard to sins of the tongue, the sight of Mr. Stanley gave her an uneasy feeling that she had been repeating scandal, and that too to the one of all others whom she should not have chosen for her auditor. So it was with a feeling of relief that she saw him take his seat again and drive off.

The two girls nodded to her, and, without waiting to ring, ushered themselves in, Dr. Bartlett's hospitable door never knowing the use of a lock during the day. Certainly there was no shadow on either of the bright young faces, glowing from the drive in the frosty air; no ominous dissatisfaction in the voices that asked in a breath for Aurora.

'Oh, do you think we may go up to her?' eagerly exclaimed Julia, the elder of the two, and receiving permission they ran up-stairs.

It was a pleasant interruption to Aurora's reverie, when, answering the knock at her door, the very subjects of her thoughts presented themselves, and while May clung to her in a sort of silent ecstasy, Julia spoke for both—

'Papa said we might come and tell you how glad we are; but indeed we never can; it seems too good to be true.'

As Aurora gave them seats beside the fire, May drew her down, and whispered two little words in her ear, bringing a blush over the beautiful face and winning a silencing kiss.

'Oh, we will learn to say it very easily,' said Julia, overhearing, 'but it was not fair, May, for you to be first; you never remember my elder sister's rights.' Then turning to Aurora, 'Do you know we talked till two o'clock this morning? Papa only told us last night, and we were so excited.'

'And not afraid?' Aurora's shadows were now fairly fled away, and the ghosts were mere objects of merriment.

'Afraid!'

Both the girls laughed at the preposterous idea.

'Oh, you don't know how delighted we were; we suspected something in New York, but he would not tell us till we got home.'

'And then,' said May, her soft blue eyes full of tears, 'if you had only seen him!'

'Dear papa,' exclaimed Julia enthusiastically, 'I don't think even you can know quite how good he is. It will be so delightful to see him happy. Not that he has been unhappy, but —.' And there she fairly broke down, not knowing how much or how little she should say.

Aurora's quiet 'I know,' re-assured her, and she went on in her usual merry strain—

'You will feel for him when you get a share of his work to do,—two wild girls to keep in order; but, indeed, we will try to be good, won't we, May?'

'And begin by forgetting papa's message?' asked May, whose gentle tone and manner seemed scarcely in keeping with the character of a wild girl, difficult to be kept in order.

'Oh—he brought us in the sleigh, and went on to the bank; he was to be back in half an hour, and if you will come he will give us all a sleigh-ride; you will, I am sure, it will be so charming.'

Yes, Aurora was more than willing; she half guessed the reason for the invitation coming in this way, and she was not wrong. She was ready in a few minutes, and they went down as the sleigh-bells were heard again,

Julia stopping for a moment to rush into the dining-room and say, 'Mrs. Bartlett, we are so happy we don't know what to do. It is very good of you to give her to us; tell the doctor so with my love.'

Through the principal street of the town glided Mr. Stanley's sleigh, with its well-known black horses, and various eyes looking out saw who it was that occupied the back seat with Julia, while May sat with her father. Due comments were doubtless made thereupon, and when the last house was passed the driver turned with a meaning smile, and asked, 'What reward should be given to the man who furnishes a whole village with a topic of conversation?'

Over the sparkling snow, lying in the brilliant sunshine which yet was powerless to destroy its beauty, they sped on their way; now and then passing another merry party, hearing from far and near the musical echo of the bells; looking over an unbroken tract of fields and meadows, covered with their spotless mantle; or pausing to examine the wonderful winter-forests, where each tree was covered with feathery white foliage. Never had Aurora so enjoyed a sleigh-ride. The exhilarating effect of the clear frosty air, with its blue sky and glorious sunlight, the rapid motion, the overflowing spirits of the two girls, had effectually banished any

feeling of awkwardness which might have been hers at their first meeting, and she was as merry as either of them.

At length, after a drive of several miles, they came back by a very round-about way, and were in sight of Mr. Stanley's house. 'The old house on the hill,' it was called by all the neighbourhood, having been built forty years before—a period of time counting in the West for more than a century elsewhere. Mr. Stanley stopped at the outer gate of his farm.

'I am going to leave you two girls here, you know you have your trunks to unpack.'

'Oh, but you must take us up to the door; the snow is so deep.'

And once there, Aurora could not without affectation resist the reasonable entreaty to go in and warm herself before setting out for home. Many a time she had been in that house, but never since the day when she had promised to come to it for life; and it was not without a heart-thrill that she crossed the threshold and stood in the room she was soon to know so well.

The two girls had the talk pretty much to themselves, as they all stood round the blazing wood-fire, but presently Julia said, 'We must show papa's present; come, May.' Off she ran, taking her sister, ostensibly for the

purpose of helping her, but with woman's tact enough to leave another motive unexpressed.

Who can wonder that Hugh Stanley turned as the door closed, leaving him alone with the woman who had renewed for him the lost dream of his youth, and folded her in his arms with murmured words of love and blessing?

Papa's present was duly brought down, with many explanations of the delay. 'It had been at the bottom of the trunk.' When the papers were taken off it proved to be a fine engraving of Aurora driving the chariot of the morning. Julia laughed and blushed as she revealed not only the picture in the frame, but her own mischievous impulse in selecting it.

'Papa,' said May, 'you are not to think that I had anything to do with it; I would not be so saucy. The frame is my share of the gift.'

'Ah, Julia,' said Mr. Stanley, shaking his head, 'that was your secret, was it? You are a little witch.'

But there was anything rather than displeasure in the tone, and Julia answered merrily—

'Oh, you don't know what a pretty speech I had ready, but you have spoiled it all by forestalling me. However, we are making each other a fair acknowledgment, —an exchange of "Auroras."'

If the sleigh-ride with the two girls had been pleasant, the return home was perfect. After a little silence Mr. Stanley spoke: 'I was right, was I not, darling?'

'As you ever are for me. But oh, Hugh, it is almost too much happiness.'

The look Aurora got in reply said plainly that too much happiness could not be her portion. So in the interchange of thoughts and feelings which are part of the joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not, they drew near the village.

'Do you think I shall ever be able to win Mrs. Bartlett's approval?' asked Mr. Stanley, but with very little of the concern that lady would have thought a necessary accompaniment of such a question.

'I don't know; she is not easily moved, but it does not matter.'

'No,' he said gravely; 'I have learned to live without the approbation of my neighbours; but for your sake—.'

'For my sake, nothing,' interrupted Aurora quickly, with a sudden flash of indignant recollection. 'Neither her want of appreciation, nor that of any one else, matters to me. Nothing the whole world could say would make you more to me; nothing it fails to say can make you less.'

'Take care, Aurora mia,' he said, half playfully. 'Remember a woman's lot—

> "To make idols, and to find them clay,
> And to bewail that worship—."'

'I am not afraid.'

The bright face, upturned to meet his gaze, reminded him of the words, 'Perfect love casteth out fear;' words spoken of the heavenly love, but which may be applied without irreverence to its fair reflection upon earth.

'You will come in?' Aurora asked, as they reached the doctor's gate.

'To make confession for you? Yes.' So his greeting to Mrs. Bartlett was—

'Good morning! You see I have come to give an account of myself; you must not think I have kept Aurora out in the cold all this time; the girls gave her a famous toasting before they would let her come away.'

The sudden lifting of her sister-in-law's eyebrows gave Aurora the first hint of the impropriety of which she had been guilty; but she was only amused; and as she heard no more of it, she never thought of it again.

The remonstrance from which she was saved was kept for her brother. That evening he was called out rather

late to see a patient, and when he returned he found his wife sitting alone in the parlour. Unless there was a probability of his being detained all night, Mrs. Bartlett always sat up for him; for the little woman really loved her husband in her own way; a way, to be sure, which did not keep her from saying sharp things to and of him on occasions, but still a way which was very true and real.

When she had brought his slippers and made him comfortable, she began—

'Arthur, I do wish you would speak to Aurora.'

'About what?'

'Why, the sort of things she does in defiance of all ordinary rules of propriety—going to the Stanleys to-day, for instance.'

'What harm was there in that, Hattie?'

'Harm! It certainly is not according to my ideas of what is becoming in a young lady, the very day after the public announcement of her engagement; for it is just as I said, you might as well have published it in the newspapers,—all Westfield knows that they are to be married.'

'And why not? It saves Aurora a great deal of annoyance, and the rest of us the necessity of choosing between a betrayal of confidence and the evasions that are

very near being falsehoods. I think she showed her good sense in making no mystery or secret in regard to it; and she can safely be trusted to regulate her own conduct.'

'Oh, of course, if you are satisfied, I ought to be,' said Mrs. Bartlett in an injured tone; 'she is your sister, not mine.'

'And when did *mine* and *thine* come to have separate meanings for us, Hattie?' said the good doctor gently.

'A soft answer turneth away wrath.' In an instant his wife was melted. 'I did not mean that, Arthur,' she said, drawing a footstool near him and sitting down at his feet. 'But Aurora has disappointed me; I am not pleased with this match, and I cannot pretend that I am.'

'Of course not, pretence of any kind would be something new for you to attempt. But here we must agree to differ; and I suppose no marriage ever gave entire satisfaction to all the lookers-on. Some years ago I knew a little woman who defied the opinions of several of her friends in marrying a stupid country doctor, but I have never heard her say she repented it.'

'Arthur! the truest remark made on that occasion was what my brother James said to Aunt Sarah, that Harriet was not half good enough for Dr. Bartlett, and

had never done anything to deserve the blessing of such a husband.'

'James was a saucy fellow to make any such speech, and it had better be forgotten, or only remembered as a proof that one's nearest relatives sometimes err in forming a judgment.'

'He did not. But, Arthur, I am afraid for Aurora; afraid she will not be happy; you know what people said—.'

'People say a great many things they should not say, Harriet. Do you think I would be careless of Aurora's future?'

'No; but you are always so ready to believe the best. And much as you despise gossip, there is generally some foundation for such stories as used to be told of Mr. Stanley and his first wife.'

'Do you not know that a half-truth distorted becomes the most frightful of lies? Let it be enough that I, who have known Stanley intimately during all the years of his residence amongst us, will give him my sister without the shadow of a doubt.'

And so Dr. Bartlett silenced his wife's curiosity. He could have given the true version of the story, with which the scandal-mongers of Westfield had enlivened many a tea-table; he might have told a strange tale of

a man's patience and forbearance, of a woman's reckless destruction of the peace and happiness of her home, by a degrading slavery to the use of a noxious drug; and without passing too harsh a judgment upon the dead, he might have compelled others to do justice to the living. But the good doctor had a very high sense of the sacredness of his calling, and not even to his own wife, nor with such an end in view, would he reveal the sad secret which had come to his knowledge in his professional capacity. The skeleton in the cupboard of the old house on the hill had been buried out of sight several years before our story begins; and there was no fear of its ever being dug up again by Dr. Bartlett.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE NEW HOME.

THE first Sunday in her new home; and Aurora looked out from her window upon a scene of surpassing beauty, the whole landscape crystallized as it were, transformed into a fairy vision. The day before had been one of pouring rain, when with one of those instantaneous changes known to the American climate, the frost had come, and seizing upon each drop of water had fixed it in its place. Every branch and twig, every brown and withered blade of grass, had been touched by the enchanter's wand, and now sparkled in the brilliant sunshine, or glowed with all the hues of the rainbow, while the common gravel-walk seemed paved with glittering gems.

'A diamond morning,' said Julia, as the family gathered in the breakfast-room; 'Nature has opened her jewel-casket for the bride.'

Even while she spoke her sister slipped out of the

room, and soon returned with some lovely little sprays of arbor-vitæ, the points of the delicate foliage encased in ice, and sparkling as she held them in the sun; but before the admiring exclamations were fairly uttered, the transient beauty was vanishing away, and the drops of water falling from her hand.

'Foolish little girl,' said Mr. Stanley, 'not to know that Winter's work cannot stand the touch of May.'

'How poetical we are this morning!' laughed Julia. 'Mamma, have you nothing pretty to say?'

'Who can tell what I might have had but for your question? Could you ever talk when asked to say something?'

'Honesty compels me to say, Yes; then, and at all other times!'

'Ah, chatterbox,' said her father, 'I am afraid that is too true. But to descend to plain prose, I advise you all to take umbrellas to church to-day; this sunshine will make sad havoc among the jewels before we come home.'

'And the trees will be weeping for their loss,' said May.

'Bravo!' exclaimed Julia, 'I think we have all earned our breakfast to-day, except mamma. Ah, well, we must let her have some for looking the poetry the rest

of us try to speak. There are the buckwheat cakes —the poetry of the kitchen.'

'Rather its substantial prose,' said Mr. Stanley.

'Why, papa, they are as light as a feather; see—' And she lifted one on her fork.

'Which all poetry is not,' Aurora suggested; 'but you had better discuss them first and their merits afterwards.'

'A wise suggestion; for of all miserable things a cold buckwheat cake is the worst.'

'Long may you retain that opinion, Julia,' said her father; 'it proves you have not encountered many of the miseries, even the minor miseries of life.'

The walk to church that morning was something not to be forgotten, and now and then the little party paused to look at the beautiful frost-picture, soon to lose its charm in the warmth of the noon-day sun.

'Aurora,' said Mr. Stanley, 'did you tell the girls how we wished for them last Sunday in New York?'

'Yes; how you would both have enjoyed the glorious music at Trinity.'

'I always do when I am there,' said Julia; 'but after all I think I would rather have our simpler service for common use.'

'I don't know: the choral music seems to me the

perfection of worship; and why should we not always offer of our best?'

'It sounds selfish to say it,' said May, 'but it would be such a deprivation not to be allowed to sing in the choir, that I would hardly like to have the choristers in our church.'

'Certainly our own music is very satisfactory when mamma is in her place,' said Julia, 'but how we did miss you last Sunday!'

'It is gratifying to one's vanity to be missed a little,' was Aurora's reply.

'Then what must it be to be missed a great deal?'

'Gratifying to something better than vanity.'

Entering the church, Mr. Stanley and his daughters took their accustomed places in the choir-gallery, while Aurora seated herself at the organ. The first sweet notes awoke beneath her touch, stealing gently upon the silence, and making audible to those who loved her best the deep content, the satisfied happiness that dwelt within her soul. But when the service had begun, it was well that she was independent of the printed notes before her. The sound of the voices near her, May's sweet clear soprano, the fuller tones of Julia's alto, blending with and supported by the rich deep bass of her husband's voice, as they joined in the anthem, 'O

come, let us sing unto the Lord,' filled her eyes with tears of gladness, and she could see nothing.

Lingering, when the congregation was dismissed, to close the organ and put away the books, the Stanleys were almost the last to leave the church. At the door stood a carriage, out of which leaned a lady evidently on the watch for some one. There was a certain doll-like prettiness in her face, small regular features, blue eyes, a pink and white complexion, a profusion of tiny crisp flaxen curls; but the soul was wanting, the expression, that might have made her beautiful. This was Mrs. M'Intyre, the second wife of Mr. Stanley's nearest neighbour, and a bride of little longer standing than Aurora. Any stranger who had seen a white-haired man of sixty hand her into the carriage would have taken him for her father rather than her husband; but, young as she was, she had been a widow when Mr. M'Intyre married her, and her two little girls of three and five years of age were sitting opposite to her.

She bowed, and smiled as Aurora appeared. 'Ah, Mrs. Stanley, I was just looking for you. You will let me have the pleasure of taking you home?'

'Thank you; you are very kind, but indeed, I prefer to walk.'

'Not in this shower of ice from the trees? You will

get your bonnet ruined if you do,' returned Mrs. M'Intyre, as if that argument were wholly unanswerable.

'I came well prepared, you see,' and Aurora held up her umbrella; 'but I am just as much obliged to you, Mrs. M'Intyre.'

'Won't one of the girls come with me, then?'

Mr. Stanley turned round: 'Julia, where is your umbrella?'

She put up her hands deprecatingly before her face: 'Papa, I forgot it; but May's will do for us both.'

'That atom of a thing? Nonsense! Come, you must go with Mrs. M'Intyre.'

Julia shrugged her shoulders.

'I will go,' said May, offering her umbrella to her sister.

'No; you shall not be punished for my sins,' and Julia took the vacant seat. 'Where is Mr. M'Intyre?' she asked, as the carriage drove off.

'He has walked on with Hector; but I cannot stand these long walks. I must either take the carriage or stay at home.'

'Do you call this a long walk? May and I think nothing of twice the distance.'

'Ah, you are accustomed to it; I am not, and it

fatigues me terribly.' Even the discussion of the topic seemed too much for Mrs. M'Intyre's energies, for she leaned back languidly in the carriage. 'I tried it two or three times when I first came here, but I found that I was only fit to lie on the sofa for the rest of the day.'

Ever afterwards Julia regarded with great complacency the self-control which she then exercised in refraining from exclaiming—'Affectation.' Overflowing with life and energy, she could not understand the perversion of mind which would make a woman proud of physical weakness, as if it were something entitling her to additional respect and consideration. Presently the carriage passed Mr. M'Intyre and his son. They bowed to Julia, and Mrs. M'Intyre said: 'I am sure Hector wishes he had come with me, now that he sees who is here.'

Julia drew herself up with a frown, but it was either unobserved or unheeded, for her tormentor went on: 'I am sure I wish you would take him in hand. It would be an act of charity to me if you would cure him of his awful gravity. The sight of Hector on a rainy day gives me the blues for a fortnight.'

Angry with the silly woman beside her, and angry with herself for the hot flush that crimsoned her cheeks,

Julia replied, 'I should be very sorry to attempt to alter Mr. Hector M'Intyre in any respect.'

'I am afraid it would be a hopeless task,' sighed Mrs. M'Intyre, fortunately failing to see another construction which might have been put upon the words, and which was only too obvious to Julia the moment they were uttered. 'But I did hope you might be inclined to smile upon him. You know I have had some experience in such things, dear; and I can see that he has eyes and ears for one young lady alone in all Westfield.'

'I am much obliged to you,' said Julia stiffly, 'but you are quite mistaken.'

'Ah, well, I did not mean any offence. Hector is really a very good fellow; if you knew him better you would see that in spite of his repellent manner.'

Not another minute could Julia endure this; and just then the carriage approached a part of the road where there was a stile and a foot-path leading by a short cut through the fields to Mr. Stanley's house.

'Will you let me get out here? It will save you coming up the hill.' And before Mrs. M'Intyre could reply, she had desired the driver to stop, and had sprung out.

'I am quite safe from the drops of water, there are no more trees to pass under. Thank you for bringing me so far.'

'Naughty girl, not to let me take you all the way. Tell your papa it was not my fault. Goodbye, come over and see us soon.'

'Detestable woman!' exclaimed Julia, as she walked rapidly up the path, her eyes filling with angry tears now that she could give way to her indignation unobserved. '"*If* I knew him better!" What do you know of him?—narrow-minded, silly little idiot that you are, utterly incapable of appreciating goodness like his. Repellent manner, indeed! I wonder what you think of your own?' And so on, till another thought turned the tide of irritated feeling against herself, and she said, 'A pretty state of mind this, to come home from church railing at my neighbours. O Julia Stanley, I am afraid you are incorrigible!'

'Papa!' she exclaimed, as the walking party entered the house about ten minutes after her, 'how could you be so cruel?'

'Cruel to save your best bonnet from destruction?'

'No, but to shut me up in durance vile with that—I had better not say it.'

'Don't, if *it* is something the sober second thought forbids.'

'Was the drive home such a penance?' asked Aurora. 'If I had known that it would be—'

'Oh, I deserved it for my forgetfulness, and I have only myself to thank; but what people see in that woman to admire—'

'She is rather pretty, and talkative,' said Aurora.

'Talkative? Yes, with a vengeance! That is it; I see now the reason why I think her so unbearable. Who is it that says there is nothing so hateful to us as the sight of our own faults in other people? She is too much like myself.'

'Julia!' exclaimed May indignantly, 'you shall not say that; you are no more like Mrs. M'Intyre than—'

'Never mind the simile; I would like to think I am not. And one thing I beg, that if ever I make myself as insufferably disagreeable as she sometimes is, I may be quietly put out of the way as expeditiously as possible.'

But the reason of this tirade Julia explained to no one. Mr. Stanley turned to his wife as the girls left the room—

'How strange it is to see two sisters, brought up together, surrounded by the very same influences, so utterly unlike!'

'I think it shows the individual strength of character in each, that they do not assimilate more.'

'Few people would give our quiet little May credit for any strength of character whatever.'

'May! she is really much the stronger of the two, ready to yield her own wishes, but never her own convictions.'

Mr. Stanley smiled. 'Yes, she knows how to make the distinction; but I doubt if she could have put it into words as she does into practice. If it were possible to blend the two together, a little of May's steadiness would improve Julia, as much as Julia's vivacity would brighten May.'

'Perhaps; but they are both dear good girls as they are, and it would be a stupid world if all its inhabitants were alike.'

'So it would; and I should be satisfied to have the strength and the brightness, the quietness and the vivacity, perfectly apportioned in one instance.'

Aurora's face glowed; but she laid her hand lightly on her husband's lips.

'Who was boasting to me that he had never spoiled his daughters? Take care, Hugh, that you do not spoil your wife.'

'Love does not spoil, Aurora.'

'I am answered,' she said with a smile; and as she turned to leave the room, she added, 'I wonder if Mrs. M'Intyre really thought I could be induced to give up my first walk home with my husband?'

CHAPTER III.

THE GATHERING OF THE WAR-CLOUD.

'BURYING her talents in the poultry-yard and pig-stye.' Was that what Aurora was doing, as morning by morning she put on her warm hood and shawl, and went out to look after her hens and chickens, scattering the corn with her own hand, and delighting in the sight of her feathered pets as they gathered round her feet to be fed; or as she paid her daily visit to the dairy to be initiated into all the mystery of butter-making? Not so did it seem to 'the farmer's wife,' proud of her title, and determined to prove herself worthy to bear it; while the country life possessed the charm for her that it ever has for a warm heart and a healthful mind. And a sweet, pure, natural life it was, that of the family in the old house on the hill, a life that many an idle woman of fashion might envy.

Mr. Stanley was not a rich man making a plaything

of his farm; but a practical farmer superintending every operation, and entering into all the details of each day's work; and while he was busy out of doors, it would have been a shame to his wife and daughters to remain idle within. Servants enough they kept to do all the hard manual labour of the house, and no more; the lighter work being equally shared amongst them. And to them it seemed no drudgery to make the beds, dust and arrange the rooms, wash the breakfast china; do the thousand little nameless things about the house that a lady's hand can do more skilfully than that of the best-trained servant.

'Many hands make light work;' and the chance visitor coming in after twelve o'clock would find the morning's duties fulfilled, and Aurora and the girls with their sewing and their books in the pleasant parlour, which had the charming homelike look natural to a room that is constantly used by people of education and refinement.

Furniture is an uncompromising truth-teller. Coax it as you may by a touch here and there, a laboured effort after careless arrangement, a persistent attempt to break up straight lines and right angles, you can never make it look a falsehood; and the room which is kept shut up from the household, and only opened

for company on grand occasions, will proclaim the fact to every observant eye.

But in the old house on the hill there was nothing for show. Something in the very air of the parlour made the visitor feel at home at once, and encouraged him to use all its belongings for his comfort and convenience. The room was full of light and warmth. Julia's canary-bird, and May's plants, which flourished and flowered under her loving care as if they felt the influence of her name, kept the memory of summer lingering there through all the winter months; and soon Aurora's friends began to feel its attractions.

One by one they discovered that it was quite a short walk from the village to Mr. Stanley's house; one by one they began to find an evening spent there a pleasant thing to anticipate, to realize, to look back upon; and then, as they learned to know her husband better, they ceased to express any astonishment at her marriage, and to wonder 'what Aurora Bartlett ever saw in Mr. Stanley.'

One of the converts was Virginia Alston. Scarcely a week passed that she did not go to spend a day with her old friend; and about two months after the marriage she astonished Aurora by a very unexpected confession.

'Did you notice,' she asked, 'that one of your friends failed to offer you any congratulations on your wedding-day?'

'No, I think not; at least I do not remember; who was it?'

'I. Don't be shocked! but I purposely refrained from doing it. The truth is, I did not know Mr. Stanley, and could not appreciate him. Am I too late now?'

'Too late!' Aurora's bright look was an answer better than words. 'Indeed you are not! I did not know then half so well as I do now the abundant cause I had for congratulation. And Virginia, most conscientious of mortals, let me congratulate *you* upon coming to your senses.'

Virginia laughed. 'I expected that; but take notice, I am not yet convinced that he did not get the best of the bargain.'

'Oh, that will come in time. Gradual changes are far more trustworthy than sudden ones.'

Virginia was a little inclined to tease. 'Perhaps I was right after all, and your influence has worked a transformation.'

But Aurora answered gravely, 'I cannot joke about such things, Virginia. If any one could know as I do

the nobility of his character;—but what nonsense for me to say that, as if any one else could!'

'You are reversing the old saying, "No man is a hero to his valet,"—that is, I suppose, to any one who knows him intimately.'

'Yes; I think it a miserable slander. True heroism can bear the closest scrutiny in the common daylight of ordinary existence. I believe many a man is a hero to his wife, while the world is too blind to see.'

'I *hope* so, at least,' said Virginia.

The most charming kind of hospitality was that exercised by Mr. Stanley and his wife. Parties they never gave; very rarely an invitation beforehand. But at their bountiful table there was always room for a friend, and a hearty welcome for the passing guest, who was made thoroughly comfortable by the consciousness that his presence disturbed none of the household arrangements, and gave no trouble whatever.

It was an understood thing when Virginia had been spending the day with Aurora, that she was not to go home before ten o'clock, and her brother always came to tea and spent the evening. Often Hector M'Intyre would join the party, or some other neighbour or friend,—the young men of Westfield finding a peculiar charm in the society of Hugh Stanley, whose broad and liberal

views on all the questions of the day, brought him into sympathy with every thoughtful mind among them. Pleasant evenings were those round the blazing wood fire, for there was no lack of topics for animated conversation during that winter—the winter of 1860-61.

Sometimes there would be music, in which the whole family would unite, aided by Hector M'Intyre, with the two Alstons for an audience; then a new book would give the central thought to all the pleasant chat, but gradually all other matters lost their interest in the growing importance of the aspect of political affairs. With their hands busily occupied in some light fancy-work, the ladies of the household were no silent listeners to such discussions. In common with all intelligent American women, they followed with deep and appreciative interest every movement in the political history of their country, forming their own opinions, and never hesitating to express them. Even quiet little May would contribute her share to such conversation between her father and his guests, never dreaming that in some parts of the civilized world she would have been looked at in silent amazement, or rebuked for a violation of feminine propriety. The gentle tones of her voice, as she uttered her convictions, always won for her one listener, who seemed to hear whatever she said, though at the

time he might be engaged in a most animated conversation at the opposite side of the room.

On one such evening, as Virginia was holding a skein of worsted for Aurora to wind, she suddenly asked—

'Aurora, why don't you write a book?'

'I write a book! I am sure I can't give you all the reasons, but amongst others because I have nothing to say.'

'Ah! if that were a sufficient hindrance I think half the authors of the present day would bid a lasting adieu to their pens, and thereby confer a great boon upon the public. But really, I wish you would.'

'Why? What has put such an idea into your head to night?'

'It has been there a long time. Ever since we were at school together my heart has been set upon seeing you an author.'

'In what field?'

'Oh, fiction of course.'

Aurora laughed outright. 'A very doubtful compliment, Virginia.'

'Nonsense! don't be stupid, you know what I mean; I have not forgotten your talent for—I must not say story-telling, or you will catch me up again—weaving romances; is that any better?'

'Scarcely.'

'I think I can give you a reason why she does not write,' said Mr. Stanley.

'I did not know you were listening; but I hope I have not been guilty of any enormity; you have not a horror of your wife becoming a literary woman, have you?'

'Not I, indeed. But my reason is this: some people write their romances, others live them; few can do both.'

Aurora's face lighted up, as it often did, at the sound of her husband's voice, but she said nothing.

'If it be true,' remarked Henry Alston, 'that deeds and words are necessarily severed for a time, then I think our literature must soon come to a stand-still.'

'Yes, but only to revive again. It has always been so in the past. Look at England: men can scarcely use their pens in the midst of the earthquake and the storm, but after all her great convulsions, her literature sprang up with renewed vigour, as if men's minds had been ploughed and furrowed, that the grain might strike its roots deeper, and bring forth a more abundant harvest.'

'I am afraid we have a little bit of history to *live*,' said Hector M'Intyre, 'other men will write it—a far easier task.'

'More than a little bit, I would say; the plot is thickening very rapidly,' said Mr. Stanley.

'O that we had Andrew Jackson in the White House!' exclaimed Virginia energetically.

'Is he one of your heroes?'

'In a measure.'

'Virginia adores people who have iron wills,' said Julia.

'I certainly do like an iron will in the right place.'

'But is this the right place or the right time?' Aurora asked. 'Would not coercion now only make matters worse?'

'I think not,' Mr. Stanley replied. 'It must come to that at last, and this is one of the cases where it is best and wisest to begin as you mean to end.'

'Papa, what do you mean?' said Julia, looking up and dropping her knitting, as in sudden consternation.

'War,' he answered quietly.

'Oh, horrible! anything would be better than that.'

'Not national dishonour,' said Hector M'Intyre, with a sudden flash in his dark eyes.

'No; but I would let every one of the Slave States go rather than fight to keep them in.'

'And what sort of a Government would that be,' asked Virginia, 'which any portion of the people may defy and set at naught when it so pleases them?'

'I am sure we can do quite well without them.'

'That is not the question, Julia.'

'And we would be rid of all complicity with slavery.'

'National sins are not so wiped out,' said Hector M'Intyre very seriously.

'Well, I would have no fighting; I would give up anything.'

'Anything but the right.' And at the sound of May's quiet voice, Henry Alston paused in his conversation with her father to glance at the little speaker with a pleased smile.

'May, what is the world coming to? Of all people on the face of the earth, I should have thought you two the very last to appeal to the arbitrament of the sword,' said Julia, addressing her sister and Hector.

He answered for both: 'There is a difference between making such an appeal, and accepting it when it is thrust upon you.'

'And,' added May, 'when the only alternative is national disgrace and destruction. You had better read "Maud," Julia; you will find something there to think upon.'

'Oh, well; I give it up. If the two most peaceable people I know are giving their sentence for open war, like Satan in "Paradise Lost"—excuse the comparison!—

there is nothing more to be said. Let us fight, by all means.'

'Let us fight, by no means,' said Hector, 'unless we must. Come, you will not say there is no such thing as a righteous war?'

'Of course I will not, with my mind stored with 4th of July orations.'

'And you acknowledge the truth contained in the words, "United we stand, divided we fall"?'

'Putting me through a regular catechism, I declare!' And Julia folded her hands, and put on a most comical expression of meekness: 'Yes, sir.'

'Then if we must fight in order to prevent the division that would be the downfall of our country, have we not a righteous cause, even though our foes are our own brethren?'

'Now, Mr. M'Intyre, that is not fair; I will not be convicted out of my own mouth. May, where is the pantry-key? I am going to get some apples.'

'O Julia, where is your honesty?' said May. 'Confess yourself conquered.'

'What would you have me do? The defeated deliver up their weapons, do they not? But my only one is my tongue, and I cannot well spare it. You must be

magnanimous, Mr. M'Intyre, after the fashion of one of our naval heroes. Don't you remember?—

"When Dacre came on board to deliver up his sword,
He looked like a crest-fallen dandy-O:
'O keep it,' says brave Hull; 'what makes you look so dull—"'

'Finish it, Julia,' said her father, laughing, as she turned towards the door.

'Thank you, papa; it is rather too bacchanalian.'

'I don't know that—

"Cheer up, my lad, and take a glass of brandy-O"

is not a totally inexcusable greeting after a sea-fight.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE UPRISING OF THE PEOPLE.

SO, talked of in every household, at times lightly, at times with serious anxiety, the little cloud in the Southern sky was growing day by day; the signs of the coming tempest were becoming more and more unmistakable. But as yet the ominous quiet preceding it was unbroken.

Still holding back from all decided measures, with a reticence differently regarded as magnanimity or as cowardice, according to the stand-point from which it is viewed, the Government withheld its hand for a season. That could not long continue. The 14th of April came—a day to be much remembered in all the future of America,—the old flag was taken down from Fort Sumter, the little devoted band marched out from its walls, the first Confederate victory was gained.

But the echo of every gun fired in Charleston harbour was reverberating throughout the loyal States,—heard

in every town and village, every home and every heart, —calling a nation to arms in defence of its own existence.

What a French writer, with a noble enthusiasm for a cause not his own, has called 'the uprising of a great people,' was something to the participants in it which no language can adequately describe. A blaze of patriotism enwrapped the whole population in an instant, blending together men and women of all opinions and modes of thought. Little differences were forgotten; they were neither Democrats nor Republicans, Conservatives nor Radicals, but simply Americans, willing to spend and be spent to the last dollar and the last drop of blood in the cause of their common country.

If this state of feeling passed away in a measure during the long weary contest that followed; if some hearts fainted, and others grew cold and suspicious; if old differences re-appeared, and new ones sprang up,—what is proved thereby, except that human nature is human nature all the world over, and cannot long remain in such a passion of noble excitement? Not the less was it at the time a grand and touching spectacle; and many brave hearts there were—a countless number—where the flame did not die out, but endured with a steady light, an unfailing warmth, even unto the end.

Westfield caught the war-fever at once, and responded to the call for troops to defend the capital. In the days gone by the young men of the town had formed a volunteer company for their own amusement, little expecting the time to come when they should be called to meet the stern realities of war. Very proud the 'Westfield Greys' had been of their soldierly appearance, their perfect drill, and, it must be confessed, of their handsome uniform. Now, touched by a deeper feeling, they had offered their services to the Government, had been accepted, and were to be incorporated in a regiment forming at the State-capital, and soon to leave for Washington.

No one who did not see it can conceive of that sudden transformation of a peaceful people into a nation of soldiers. One day busy in the field or the market, in the counting-house or at the desk; the next standing in the ranks prepared to do or die in a cause felt to be dearer than life itself. Literally true was the description given by the wife of one of those citizen soldiers, when she wrote:—

> 'But yesterday War's stern alarms
> Startled the quiet of the land:
> To-day, the countless men-at-arms
> Upon a thousand mountains stand.

The blood of heroes fills our soil,
And, rising from such precious seed,
In bristling ranks, the warrior-crop
Springs, quickened by the country's need.

'The forests of the North no more
Echo with clang of axe and oak,
Lakes lave the solitary shore,
Unruffled by the oarman's stroke;
But down the city's cheering street
The trained thousands move as one,
O'er plains that quake beneath their feet
The legions of the Union come!
Responsive to their country's call,
And faithful to their country's cause;
The watchword that inspires them all—
"*The Constitution and the Laws!*"'[1]

In many a little town and village the petty interest in the private affairs of one's neighbours was forgotten, the small feuds and quarrels were made up,—hearts drawing near each other in a common sympathy, and warming towards those who were going out to bear their part in the conflict. There is a bright side to every picture, even the picture of a time of war; and in Westfield, as in a thousand other places, the influences awakened into activity were not wholly evil.

But who can estimate the amount of silent heroism

[1] Juliet H. L. Campbell, of Pennsylvania.

in the once happy homes, from which husbands and fathers, brothers and sons, went forth—too many, alas! to return no more? Who can tell the suffering through which the outward composure was attained as the sacrifice was made without a murmur?

When Henry Alston, the captain of the Westfield Greys, came home and declared his resolution to go to the war, neither of the two women whose lives were bound up in his uttered a word of remonstrance, or even of regret. That Virginia should not was no more than he had expected; her patriotism was of no negative kind; had she been a man she would have been the first volunteer from the county, and she was equally ready to give the woman's harder offering, not of herself, but of her best and most dearly loved. But Mrs. Alston's acquiescence was matter of surprise to every one who knew her, and chiefly to those of her own household. She who made such a grievance of every trifling annoyance or discomfort, who could not bear to be put out of her way for any reason whatever, to whom both Henry and Virginia dreaded to suggest the slightest alteration in anything which had become a habit of the family; what new spirit had been aroused within her that she assented without a moment's opposition? Was it a new spirit? Was it not rather

that the touchstone of a real trial revealed the strength of character which had been hidden during all those years of semi-invalidism?

In Mrs. Alston's case, long delicacy of health had had the effect of making her selfish and exacting. Shielded from every real care and anxiety, she had fallen into a habit of fretting over little things; and if her conscience ever uttered a word of rebuke, she silenced it by the ever ready and plausible excuse of 'the state of her nerves.' Forgetting that life is principally made up of trifles, she never attempted to bring Christian principle to bear upon them to the restraining of impatience if a door were left open when it should have been shut, or too much sugar put into her coffee, or too little into her tea. Such things were to be borne with unconcern by people who were well and strong, but were too much for the delicate sensibilities of an invalid. And so she petted and spoiled herself, destroying her own happiness by such self-indulgence in the luxury of fault-finding, and wearing out the patience and the affection of her daughter, who was really a most considerate and devoted companion, in spite of her occasional rebellions against the unreasonable interference to which she was subjected.

Now, however, a real sacrifice was demanded of her,

one that no strength of nerves, no degree of robust health, could have enabled her to bear with indifference; and so Mrs. Alston did not regard herself as absolved from the duty of making the effort. Before a word was spoken, she knew how it would be, she felt that her son was not one to withhold his hand when his country needed his aid; and, in her inmost heart, she rejoiced that she had something to give to the cause that aroused all the better feelings of her nature. Once for all the demon of self was dethroned, not to be enshrined again during the few remaining years of her life; and the war, which searched and tried so many characters, proved that Mrs. Alston's was not the weak despicable thing it had seemed.

The same scene was enacted in many a household; in the blacksmith's shop, where Jack Hill threw down the ponderous hammer with a clang, and vowed that he 'would go and teach them confounded rascals how to fire on the flag their fathers had died for;' in the clergyman's study, where the son, who had just returned from college with the highest honours proudly won, looked in his father's face, and said, 'It is time to know whether we have a Government or not, and I must help to answer the question aright;' in the banker's parlour, where Fred Osborne shrugged his

shoulders, and declared, 'upon his soul it was very disagreeable to have to kill one's fellow-countrymen, but if they would have it, who was to blame? And as they would probably kill a few in return, it was better that such idle fellows as he should go, rather than any one who was of more use in the world.' Everywhere the same silent struggle in some hearts, everywhere the same result. Like David of old, the people of America did not offer unto the Lord—for the offering to the country was felt to be in the highest sense an offering unto Him—of that which cost them nothing.

But what was poor little Emily Osborne to do about her birthday party? On the 1st of May she would be eighteen; and eagerly had she been anticipating the day, which was to be celebrated by the giving of such a ball as Westfield had never seen before. Indeed, the invitations were out already. Printed in Cincinnati 'in the highest style of the art,' tied with blue ribbons, in the daintiest little bows that even Emily's neat fingers could devise, they had been left by a man on horseback at every house in the town and surrounding country, where such an invitation could be supposed to give a moment's pleasure. Waking, she had planned the arrangement and decoration of the rooms, sleeping, she had dreamed of nothing else; the very dress she

was to wear was lying ready in the spare room; and now—and now, the vision had fled!

Out of the world in which she had lived, a world all sunshine, where care and sorrow were unknown, where one day of pleasure gave way to another quite as fair and bright, she had suddenly descended; and lo! the sky was covered with clouds, the daylight was darkened, the flowers were fading, and everything seemed dreary and desolate. It was her first experience of the sad realities of life, her first encounter with its trials and disappointments, and 'the poor little butterfly' was overwhelmed and crushed.

'I cannot, Fred, I cannot,' she said, even with tears; 'we must write to them all and say it is given up. It would be heartless and wicked to think of having a party now.'

'Then I am heartless and wicked, that is all,' answered her brother, twirling his moustache, 'I am not going to be cheated out of my last dance with all the pretty girls.'

'O Fred! who could dance at a time like this?'

'You could, I am very sure, if you only would not take such awfully dismal views of things. Why, you make a fellow feel as if his grave were already dug. You don't suppose we are all going to be killed in the first fight, do you?'

Emily did not know what she thought; but she did know she would expect to be killed. Evidently Fred did not.

'Come now, be reasonable, Emmie, there's a good girl. Think what a disappointment it would be to everybody! Why, it is the very thing to send us off in good spirits, and determined to come back with all sorts of laurels. And then we were all going to wear our uniforms, and give the whole thing a military air. You are not going to deny me my last request?'

No. If he put it on these grounds, Emily was ready to endure the party as she would have been ready to go through fire and water, to sacrifice her own wishes, feelings, tastes, in any other way that her brother might please. But that was scarcely what she had anticipated, poor child! and the change of an eagerly expected pleasure into a cross and a self-denial was as hard to her as it is to the rest of us.

Of course, the public could know nothing of what was passing behind the scenes; and so some people said that Emily was a heartless, unfeeling little wretch, who cared for nothing but her own amusement, and would dance over her brother's grave; and others wondered if anything on earth would ever cure the Osbornes of their worldliness and love of display; and

hoped, with ominous shakes of Pharisaic heads, that some terrible lesson might not be in store for them.

Yet, strange to say, no one thought of staying away from the party,—no one, except Virginia Alston.

'I can't go, Henry,' she said, much in the tone in which Emily had spoken to her brother. 'If the Osbornes had any sense of propriety, they would give it up.'

'I don't know that,' Henry answered. 'I should like to go; everybody will be there, and it will be a pleasant memory to take away. But I will not go without you.'

'I have nothing to wear,' said Virginia, the change in her tone of objection being the first sign that she was wavering.

'Oh, Miss Flora M'Flimsey! Is that it? No want more easily supplied. I will go and buy you a dress this minute; and help you to make it on the machine. What shall it be? The skirt in red and white stripes, the body blue, with gold stars—nothing if not patriotic now-a-days, you know.'

Virginia smiled a miserable, sad smile.

'If you really wish it, Henry, I can make one of my old dresses do.'

'I do really wish it, Virginia.'

'Very well; I will go.'

What would Virginia Alston have thought if she had been told that this was but the repetition of the scene enacted by Emily Osborne and her brother,—Emily, whom she deemed utterly incapable of any self-sacrifice, and that 'empty-headed dandy, Fred,' as she was wont to call him? Conscious of her own pure motive, she would go to the party, but she was utterly unconscious that the very same feeling actuated those upon whom she looked down with something like contempt. So do we judge our neighbours.

Afterwards, Virginia thought, with a little bitterness, that she need not have gone on Henry's account, if she had known. But she did not know, and neither did he, what was to come of Emily Osborne's birthday ball.

CHAPTER V.

THE BIRTHDAY BALL, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

BUT after all, the trial did not prove so great in reality as it had been in anticipation. Perhaps it was because the buoyant spirit had too much elasticity to be crushed at once, perhaps it was but the result of the never-failing law that the effort to gratify others brings its own reward; at any rate, and from whatever cause, Emily awoke on the morning of the 1st of May with the feeling that a little bit of the sun was still shining, metaphorically as well as actually.

There was no resisting the loving words and wishes that greeted her when she went down to breakfast, and she could not fail to be in ecstasies over her father's present of a beautiful watch and chain, and the diamond bracelet which her mother clasped round her wrist. Fred's offering of a locket with his own likeness, however, was quite too suggestive, and a few tears would fall upon it in spite of all her efforts to restrain them,—

tears that she knew to be but the first instalment of many and many a shower yet to come.

But her smiles came back as she received the little gifts of her younger brothers and sisters, the children to whom 'sister Emily' was a princess reigning in unquestioned supremacy, partly by reason of her beauty and her sweet temper, and partly by reason of her long absence from home at boarding-school, during which time she had been to them an ideal being, in whom were combined all possible graces and virtues, and to whom they were to look up as a model and an exemplar. Coming home with the winning manner that few people could resist, Emily had established her reign in their hearts, and it was not likely to be rudely broken; for there was a difference of ten years between her and Minnie, the next sister, several of Mrs. Osborne's children having died in infancy; so that there were no brothers or sisters near her own age to call in question her supremacy or despise her gentle authority.

What any heart of woman could desire beyond a 'real gold' watch, a diamond bracelet, and 'brother Fred's' locket, passed the power of little Minnie's imagination to conceive, and if she had been told that the recipient of all these charming things was not quite happy, and would gladly have resigned the crowning

delight, the ball, for which even the children were to be allowed to sit up, doubtless she would have thought 'sister Emily' a fit subject for the State lunatic asylum. All day long the happy child kept close to her sister, and perhaps she managed to infuse into her a little of her own joyousness, for when evening came Emily was very much her own bright self. She was no strong character resolutely resisting all outside influences, and the brightening up of things in general could not fail to have such an effect. Deep down in her inmost heart there was one sad foreboding, but she shut it up out of sight; and as she finished dressing, and turned to go down-stairs, with one little sigh she bade it bide its time.

Certainly she did look very bewitching in her white tarletan dress, with a wreath of forget-me-nots in her fair hair, her eyes as blue as the flowers, and a lovely colour in her dimpled cheeks. Blind envy sometimes hinted that she was guilty of adding this last touch to her many attractions, as if any hand but Nature's could paint that delicate rose-hue, fading away imperceptibly into the pure white of throat and brow. No wonder father, mother, and brother were proud of the little fairy-like creature: no wonder Minnie declared confidentially to the little ones that she was quite sure Cinderella must have been exactly like sister Emily.

Early hours the good people of Westfield were accustomed to keep; by eight o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Osborne were standing in their places to receive their guests, and Emily was flitting here and there to put a finishing touch to wreath or bouquet, or drapery of flags; by nine the whole company had assembled, and the dancing had begun.

Very soon Emily made the discovery that she could dance in spite of the fact that Fred was there before her very eyes in his uniform; and dance she did hour after hour unweariedly, and with no feigned animation. Was she thinking only of her own amusement, caring only for her own gratification?

Early in the evening a young man approached her with the usual request, 'Miss Emily, will you do me the honour to dance the next quadrille with me?'

'With pleasure, only I must tell you my conditions first.'

'They are granted beforehand,' was his reply.

Emily laughed, a clear ringing childlike laugh it was.

'Each of my partners must consider himself engaged for two dances.'

The young man, who was one of Emily's most devoted admirers, uttered some eager protestation of that only adding to his felicity.

'Oh, not to me,' she exclaimed, a little startled, 'I did not mean that. I only mean that you must let me choose your next partner.'

'Miss Emily, if the Gorgon herself were among your guests I would obey your commands.'

And so it was that Miss Pringle, one of the public-school teachers, a lady of questionable or unquestionable age, who yet persisted in fancying that her youth had not yet gone by, and who would go to parties in spite of the many slights she received, found herself asked to dance again and again, and by gentlemen who had never before seemed conscious of her existence. So it was that nobody seemed to be unattractive that night; nobody sat in corners or stood against the wall unnoticed and unhappy. Was Emily acting only as a miserable little worldling, or according to her ability exercising that charity which can condescend to be kind even in such trifles?

Her little speech to each of her partners might have been taken for self-assertion; for what right had she to dictate terms, and order other people about as if she were, at least, the Empress of all the Russias? No right that she would have claimed for an instant had it been called in question; but the sense of her power was too common a thing to give her a second thought, and

she accepted it as one of the pleasant things that in some way, she knew not how, had fallen to her lot. If she showered around her bright smiles and pleasant words, exerting herself to the utmost to entertain the most uninteresting and stupid of her partners, it was from no spirit of coquetry; and as she dismissed him, pleased with himself as well as with her, and feeling gratified with his own unusual success in the hard task of conversation, Emily might have enjoyed the approval of her conscience if she had been given to self-scrutiny, if she had not acted very much upon the principle of the flowers when they bloom and the birds when they sing, because it is their nature so to do, and quite apart from any question of duty.

One of Emily's partners, and only one, she had accepted without any dictation of terms, and that was Henry Alston. Apart from the honour of dancing the first quadrille with the captain of the Westfield Greys, she would have preferred any one else; for she was a little afraid of him, and felt herself rather a foolish weak-minded person when in his company; fancying that he must compare all other girls with the sister for whose knowledge and wisdom she had the highest respect, and being well aware that she must suffer by such comparison. She would have felt it an

impertinence to suggest any one for his next partner, but she was a little curious to see where his choice would fall.

When he crossed the room to May Stanley, and claimed her as by a previous engagement, Emily rather wondered at the bright happy expression of her face. May was so shy, so timid and reserved, that she would have expected her to stand in awe of Captain Alston; yet there she stood beside him, evidently perfectly at her ease. The only solution which suggested itself was the ready acknowledgment of May's superior intellectual gifts and higher culture, which might enable her to carry on a conversation worthy of the attention of the talented young lawyer.

Virginia Alston did not dance. She thought it frivolous and beneath the dignity of any woman come to years of discretion; but she was at no loss for entertainment. In one corner of the parlour she stood bending over a volume of exquisite engravings, quite lost to everything around her, when she was aroused by the sound of her own name spoken by a strangely familiar yet unaccustomed voice. She looked up and started forward: 'Archie! is it possible? where have you come from?'

'Like Satan—from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.'

'Condescend upon particulars if you can,' she said, laughing.

'Well, you know my propensity for getting into hot water. I was away up the Nile, when a sudden impulse came over me drawing me home. I obeyed it; but I might have known it meant mischief. And no sooner had I landed in New York than I heard of this infernal business down at Charleston: excuse the strong expression.'

'It is not too strong. But why did you not come to us? and how do you happen to be here?'

'For the first, a man has no right to walk out of Egypt straight into anybody's house without asking if it will be convenient to the inmates to have him.'

'Oh, I see, you have forgotten our free and easy Western manners on your travels.'

'For the second,' he said, taking no notice of that remark, 'I met Fred Osborne, and he asked me to come. I thought I should find all Westfield here, and probably make a small sensation by my sudden appearance in the midst.'

'A very pleasant sensation, Archie. I am so glad you have come back. It is not a time for any man to be unnecessarily absent from his country.'

'Ah—I see. You are one of the heroic women who

mean to devote all their male relatives to the good cause.'

Virginia's face grew sternly indignant. 'Don't speak in that tone, Archibald. I cannot bear it.'

'I won't, then; but we will talk of this again, cousin mine. At present, tell me who is who. You know it is four years since I was in Westfield, and people grow out of one's recollection so. Who is that with Hector M'Intyre? I see I am not the only black coat. I suppose he is not one of the "Greys."'

'No; his partner is Julia Stanley.'

'What! my old pet Julia grown into such a stately lady? And that—ah, that is May; she is less altered. But tell me who is that beautiful woman at the end of the room?'

'Which one? Your beauty may not be one of mine.'

'There; in white satin and lace, looking like a bride.'

'As she is: that is Mrs. M'Intyre.'

'M'Intyre married! you don't say so? I never heard of it. Well, he always was a lucky fellow. I must go and offer my congratulations.'

And Archibald Dubois moved away, as Virginia, unconscious of his mistake, turned to speak to some one else. The quadrille was just ended, and he made

his way across the room, recalled himself to Julia's remembrance in an easy pleasant manner, claimed her hand for the first dance for which she was not already engaged, and then turned to Hector:—

'So this is what you have been doing in my absence? I am quite dazzled by Mrs. M'Intyre's beauty. First let me congratulate you, and then come and introduce me to your wife.'

Hector's look of puzzled surprise gave way to a deep flush; but he answered with grave dignity—

'You are mistaken, Dubois; Mrs. M'Intyre is my father's wife. He will introduce you with pleasure.'

'I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, I quite misunderstood.'

And the young man made good his retreat, leaving poor Julia in a most uncomfortable position,—longing to offer the sympathy that yet would have been an impertinence; and feeling as if she had intruded herself into Hector M'Intyre's private affairs by having been the witness of his evident annoyance.

'Virginia, Virginia,' exclaimed Archibald, in mock despair, as he returned to his cousin, 'I have made an awful *faux pas*.'

'What was it?'

'Congratulated Hector on his marriage! Who could

have thought the old man would be such a fool at his age as to marry that young creature? Why did you not tell me?'

'Poor Hector!' said Virginia compassionately. 'I am afraid he must think it no matter for congratulation. But don't waste your time, Archie, in standing here talking to me; you will come to us to-morrow. Go now and join the dancers.' And left to herself again, Virginia took refuge in one of her favourite amusements,—making the scene before her a study of human nature. First she began to watch Mrs. M'Intyre, and as she did so, she reversed some of her harsh judgments passed upon Emily Osborne. This woman was evidently a practised coquette; the airs and graces, so evidently artificial, the smiles, the little frowns and pouts put on for the purpose of winning admiration, made Emily's innocent childlike manner appear in its true light by force of contrast.

As Virginia looked on, she became more and more disgusted with what she saw. There sat Mr. M'Intyre, the old white-haired man, for whom such a scene could have no attraction, and before his very eyes his wife was flirting with one young fellow after another, in a way that was decidedly shocking to the simple morals of a country town. Now and then his eyes rested upon her

with a look of fervent admiration; and Virginia's heart was full of indignation against the woman who seemed to her utterly unworthy of the affection of so true and good a man. Pitying him most sincerely, and noticing his look of weariness, she crossed the room and sat down beside him, to enliven him with a little conversation. But though grateful for the attention, his thoughts evidently wandered, as his eyes did, to his wife. 'Infatuated,' thought Virginia; 'long may he remain so!'

Presently Mrs. M'Intyre came to them, and said, in what was meant for her most bewitching manner,—

'Oh, thank you, Miss Alston, for being so kind as to entertain my husband. I was just afraid he might find it dull, but I am so fond of dancing.'

'You seem to be,' said Virginia,—words innocent in themselves, but spoken in a tone that made Mrs. M'Intyre feel rebuked and annihilated. From that time she hated Virginia Alston as such women can hate.

But however much Virginia might be interested in watching other people, she had never lost sight of her brother, and it pleased her to see him devoting himself to May Stanley,—'little May,' who was a mere child in her eyes, but a child thoroughly good and true, and thoughtful beyond her years. She saw them go to the supper-room together, and then she saw no more.

May's going there at all was a mere form; the room was hot and crowded, and presently she said, 'Mr. Alston, will you take me back to the parlour, and leave me there? I will be less in the way than I am here.'

'Are you tired?' he asked, with a look of concern.

'A little; you know I have been to few parties heretofore.'

The parlour was deserted, and he led her to a seat beside one of the windows. It opened down to the verandah at the back of the house, and beyond lay the garden in the calm pure moonlight. What a contrast to the scene within!'

May gave a little sigh of relief: 'How sweet and still it is!'

'Would you like to go out?'

'Oh, very much.'

'You are not afraid of the night air?'

'Not when it is so warm as this.'

He opened the window and they stepped out, but not beyond the shadow of the verandah. May sat down upon a rustic seat, and drank in the silent beauty of the lovely night.

'This evening has given me some pleasant memories to take away with me,' said Henry Alston, standing beside her.

'I am very glad,' she answered simply; then added, 'Do you know Hector M'Intyre is going to volunteer?'

'No; is he?' said her companion absently.

'He told us so to-night. I thought he would.'

'Why?'

'Because he is so much in earnest in everything. It must be delightful to be able to give such a proof of one's patriotism. I am glad Westfield is showing so good an example.'

'You must be a very happy little person, May; twice in three minutes you have told me you are glad.'

She was silent for a moment, and then she said, 'I suppose one is more conscious of little bits of gladness at a time when there is so much reason to be sorry.'

'Sorry for what?'

'For the terrible state of the country, for the giving up of friends, for all the people whose relations are going into the army; and yet—I almost envy them too.'

'Why do you envy them?'

'Because next best to going one's-self, must be the sending of some one who is dear to you. It would make me feel as if I were doing something in the good cause.'

'Will you let me go for you, May?'

She looked up, wondering what he could mean; but something in the earnest gaze that met her own sent her eyes down again.

'Will you let me feel that I have a twofold motive — a double incentive—your part to bear as well as my own? It will help me to bear it well, May, if I may hope that this little hand will give me my reward.'

And as he spoke he bent his head and touched it lightly with his lips.

Poor little May! A lightning flash seemed to go through her heart, revealing to her a thousand things whose existence she had not suspected. In an instant she saw them all,—the reasons why those winter evenings had been so happy, and the day for Virginia's visit the centre of all the week; the explanation of the dreary feeling she had been combating of late; the cause of her happiness this evening. For an instant she was blinded by the sudden light; then her usual self-control came to her aid, and very gently the little hand was laid in his. He was answered.

Five minutes, that might have been seconds or might have been centuries, for aught they knew of the duration of time, and then a burst of music within, startling them both, and bringing them back to the actual world around them.

'Oh, what shall I do?' exclaimed May. 'I cannot go back.'

'You shall not, unless you choose. Would you like me to take you home?'

'Yes, indeed I would; but Julia—'

'I will manage that. Wait for me here.'

He slipped into the parlour unobserved, and found Julia.

'Come with me for a moment.'

She started, 'What is the matter, Mr. Alston? where is—'

'Nothing is the matter,' he said, interrupting the question, which might have been inconvenient in a crowded room. When they had reached the hall he gave the explanation—

'May wishes to go home quietly and without being missed. Will you get me her things? I will take them to her and you must cover her retreat.'

'But—. Mr. Alston, where is she? Is anything wrong?' asked Julia, half puzzled, half alarmed.

'I hope you will not think so, Julia, when you are told,' he answered, with a smile; and Julia rushed away with her face in a glow, understanding, and yet ashamed to understand so easily. She came back in a moment with her sister's shawl and hood; but for once

in her life, as she afterwards confessed, her tongue fairly failed her.

'Thank you,' said Henry. 'You will keep our counsel, Julia.'

So through the warm still moonlight night, May Stanley walked home in an ecstasy of happiness that made it impossible to speak, except in little broken sentences, a word or two, and no more. They seemed all-sufficient, however, to her one auditor, and that was enough.

At the door he paused. 'Tell me good-night here, May.'

'Good-night,' she said softly.

But he still held her hand. 'Is that all?'

'Good-night, Henry,' the last word scarcely audible; and opening the door she fled up stairs, leaving him to tell his own story to her father; but without a misgiving as to its reception.

Aurora had gone to bed, but she heard a light footstep, and then a knock at her door.

'Home already, May!' she said; 'papa did not expect you for an hour yet, and I was tired, and left him to sit up alone.'

'Julia has not come, mamma, but I—' and there May came to a full stop.

'Were you not well, dear, or only sooner wearied than Julia?'

'Neither, mamma, it was not that; but I could not stay—' And throwing her arms round Aurora, she told her in a few half-intelligible words that Henry Alston had asked her to be his wife.

Aurora was thoroughly delighted.

'My darling, I am so glad for you; my little May, I don't know any one half so worthy of you.'

'But oh, mamma, he is going away—' And May's self-control and courage gave way, and she burst into tears, quite forgetting her heroic speech about the pleasure of sending some one to the war. However, her fits of crying were neither very frequent nor of long duration, and she soon dried her eyes and went away to her own room, to find her joy and her sorrow reconciled, her hopes and fears subdued into a spirit of quiet trustfulness in her best and highest Friend.

And when Julia came home, half beside herself with eager curiosity and excitement, she was surprised to find May lying wide awake in the moonlight, as serene and unruffled as if nothing had happened, with very little to say, and nothing more to tell her than she had heard already from her father down-stairs.

To Hugh Stanley it was a source of intense happiness

to find that May had gone straight to Aurora with the story of her joy, as naturally and simply as if to her own mother.

His talk with Henry Alston had been very short and satisfactory—an unqualified approval, a ready assent—though he was undoubtedly taken by surprise, and startled to find that his little girl had grown into a woman capable of winning so deep and strong an affection, while he had been fancying that she was still a child.

CHAPTER VI.

HECTOR M'INTYRE'S SACRIFICE.

'WELL, May, I always said I pitied the woman destined to be Henry's wife, for I have in me the making of a veritable book sister-in-law. An angel out of heaven would scarcely have seemed to me good enough for him, much less any mortal woman.' So said Virginia.

'Then we have found our first point of agreement at once,' was May's reply. 'I am of the very same opinion.'

'Little witch! is that the way in which you disarm me? I will tell you a small secret: as the angel did not choose to come down for my criticism, I know no one with whom I should quarrel so little as May Stanley.' And Virginia gave her a kiss in token of peace between them.

Every one thought it best that the engagement should be made public,—every one except May herself. Aurora said it would save endless gossiping, and protect her

from annoyance. Virginia declared, with some asperity, that any woman living might be proud to be known as Henry Alston's future wife. Julia made dire lamentation over the fibs she would be compelled to tell if it were to be kept secret; and finally, Mr. Stanley said it was absurd to foster such an exaggerated timidity and shyness.

But May stood firm, saying little, yet never yielding an inch, and carried her point, as such quiet people generally do. No one thought of deliberately violating her wishes in a matter where she had an undoubted right to choose for herself; and she was so confused and uncomfortable even at meeting Mrs. Alston, and receiving the congratulations of Dr. and Mrs. Bartlett, that it seemed best that she should have her own way, however silly and unreasonable the way of her selection might seem to other people.

That point conceded, May was her own serene little self again. Even the departure of the 'Greys' did not disturb her outward composure, and Aurora found her a curious subject for speculation. Was her love for Henry Alston the same feeling which she had had for Hugh Stanley in the days before their marriage, and if not, could it be as deep and true? Virginia seemed to take to heart his absence far more than May, which was

only natural, all things considered. Out of his sister's daily life something was taken that could not be replaced. She missed him every hour of the day; the house was empty and desolate without him. With May it was different; she had never learned the habit of dependence upon him; once or twice a week was as often as she had ever seen him, and now that he was gone, he had left with her the new sweet knowledge of his love. The letters that came with unfailing regularity almost made amends for the loss of his occasional visits, and May was really much less to be pitied than Virginia.

'Do you know, Hugh,' said Aurora one day to her husband, 'I am inclined to think this separation the best thing possible both for May and Henry?'

'New doctrine to come from you,' he answered; 'but I suppose one's-self and one's neighbours are always judged by different rules?'

'There is a saucy insinuation there which I shall not answer. What I mean is this: they will learn to know each other far better through their correspondence than they could have done in any other way. May lets herself out in her letters as she never does otherwise; her shyness only leaves her when she has a pen in her hand.'

'I daresay you are right; but who would have expected you to advise the separation of lovers?'

'I did not advise it; and—well, I may as well say it,—May and Henry are not the kind of lovers I have had experience of before.'

Mr. Stanley laughed a ready assent to the implied comparison.

This was about a week after the departure of the Westfield volunteers. The same afternoon he had occasion to go into town; at the post-office he found a letter awaiting him, which he opened and read, then remounting his horse, he rode slowly home. It was a relief to find the parlour deserted, Aurora and the girls having gone out for a walk. For some time he sat buried in thought; then, starting up with the air of a man who has cut the Gordian knot of his difficulties, he opened his desk, and sitting down beside the window, wrote rapidly and decidedly.

The letter which he had received was from the Governor of the State, an old college companion, and ran thus:—

'Dear Stanley,—It is a long time since I last heard of you, but I know that in these trying days you will be found as true as steel. I am overrun with applicants

for the command of our regiments, but the large majority are utterly incompetent, and I will not appoint men in whom I have no confidence. Have you no desire to serve your country in this way? I know you can if you will; and I would gladly give you the command of the 10th. Let me hear from you at once.'

This was the reply:—

'My dear old Friend,—I have your kind letter, which at any other time would have been to me a strong temptation. You know my military proclivities, and you are right in judging me true to the principles we have always shared. But just now I cannot see that it is my duty to go. Under the old Jewish law a man who had married a wife was absolved from bearing arms for a year; that being my case, I must claim the like privilege.—Truly yours, H. S.'

Scarcely had he laid aside his pen when Aurora came in; she went straight up to him, 'What is the matter, Hugh?'

'Did I say that anything is?'

'Yes; to me, as plainly as if you had spoken.'

'Eyes of the morning,' he said, with a smile, looking up into her face, 'how is it that you see into my heart?'

She laid her soft cool cheek against his. 'Tell me, darling,' she said gently.

He put the two letters into her hand. 'This one first,' and she read. With his arm round her he felt the tremor that passed through her frame; but she finished reading them both before she spoke. Then it was to say, with a quiver in her voice—

'Hugh, if it were your duty, I would not hold you back.'

'I know it, my sweet wife; but it is not my duty. I could not leave you now, Aurora; it would not be right. Should the time come when I shall feel that I ought to go, I know who will be proved to have the braver spirit of the two.'

She drew away from him a little as the girls came in; they had not been married long enough for love-making in public.

'Papa,' said May, 'do you know that Mr. M'Intyre is very ill?'

'No; I am sorry to hear it. What is the matter?'

'He took cold the night of Emily Osborne's party.' May's ready blush crimsoned her cheeks as she hesitated; 'he has never been well since. Hector met us just now, and he seems to be very anxious.'

'I will go over and see,' which he did, returning with a very unfavourable report.

Virginia Alston had come in during his absence.

'I thought that woman would be the death of him,' was her comment. And there was only too much truth in the charge. Going out of Mrs. Osborne's heated rooms on the evening of the party, some caprice had made Mrs. M'Intyre insist upon walking home; and the old man, exposed to the sudden change of temperature, had taken cold, and was now alarmingly ill.

It was Hector who watched over him night and day with the patient tenderness of a woman; Hector who smoothed his pillows and administered his medicine; Hector to whom he turned for every comfort and every attention.

Mrs. M'Intyre was worn out with anxiety and fatigue,—so she said; though what had fatigued her, it would have been difficult to say. She lay upon her sofa the greater part of the day; only being able by a superhuman exertion to pay an occasional visit to the sick-room. When there she would spend the time in petting and bemoaning her husband as if he had been a baby; and in such a manner that she always succeeded in driving Hector out of the room, not to return till she had withdrawn.

With the kindly custom of a country-town, where a hired nurse would have been looked upon with horror,

the neighbours offered their services to assist in the night-watching; and Mr. Stanley was there at the last.

The sick man had been lying in an uneasy slumber; but towards morning he awoke. 'Hector,' he said, in a feeble voice.

'I am here, father.'

'There are some things I would like to say to you while I can.'

The son, well understanding his meaning, made no foolish remonstrance; but sat down beside the bed, and took one of the wasted hands in his.

'She is very young, Hector,' said the old man, 'very young, and she has no one to look to. She cannot return to her old home in the South. Promise me that you will take care of her, and be gentle with her for my sake.'

'I promise,' said Hector, in a deep grave tone.

'You will not let her go away, and you will not leave her here alone? You will stay and watch over her when I am gone?'

The dying eyes looked up wistfully into the young man's face, but saw there no remonstrance against the sacrifice so demanded. The reply came as readily as before:

'I will do all you ask. Is there anything more?'

'No, I think not. God bless you, Hector, you have been a good son.' Then he slept again. But as the day dawned he suddenly opened his eyes.

'Mary,' he said gently, 'Mary, it has been a long weary journey, but I have come home at last.'

Afterwards he spoke no more; only when the clergyman came, and, kneeling beside his bed, repeated the prayers which long usage had made the very voice of his soul, the restless motion of his hands ceased, and he lay with an expression of perfect peace upon his face. Before the sun set he was at rest.

Home at last to the first love, the one real affection of his life, to the Mary who had never been dethroned from her place in his inmost heart; home at last to the Father's house on high, where she was waiting to welcome him.

And the son, who had idolized his mother during her life, and reverenced her memory with jealous devotion, treasured up those last words, finding in them balm for the bitter wound inflicted by his father's ill-considered second marriage. Outwardly it had made no breach between them, nor disturbed the harmony of their relations; but deep down in Hector's heart there had been a difference since the day when he discovered the wretched mistake Mr. M'Intyre had made. It was

reconciled now; there was perfect peace between them; and he turned back to his daily life, to take up the burden of the heavy charge imposed upon him.

There were not wanting interested friends to make their comments upon the new order of things. It was a most extraordinary arrangement that Hector should remain there with a stepmother younger than himself, and she too a woman devoid of all ordinary prudence and discretion. Mr. M'Intyre must have been out of his senses when he asked it, and if dying people made ridiculous requests, it was absurd to consider them binding upon the living. The farm belonged to Hector, having come to him from his mother, and Mr. M'Intyre must have left his widow quite enough to live upon elsewhere. Such were the remarks.

But Mrs. M'Intyre had not the smallest intention of going elsewhere; she had sense enough to know where she was well off; and a very simple arithmetical calculation convinced her that the interest of the money left her by her husband would go much farther while she remained an inmate of Hector's home. Accordingly she accepted her position.

And Hector made no question as to his own course; he had given a promise to his father, and he would fulfil it to the end. There was no struggle with himself,

for his will never wavered; the path of duty lay plain before him, he would walk in it at whatever cost.

The bitterness of the trial no one ever knew; it was only guessed at by the few friends who understood the full strength of his character, and who had known something of the intense enthusiasm with which he had devoted himself to the work now forbidden him. To withhold his hand and stand aside while others went forth to fight the battles of his country, that was indeed the sacrifice of his most eager hopes and aspirations.

People said Hector M'Intyre took his father's death terribly to heart; so he did, but it was something more than his father's death which caused him to look so careworn and weary, as if ten years had been added to his age.

For some time Mrs. M'Intyre refused to see any one, and shut herself up in her own room, bewailing her hard fate, after the fashion of such self-engrossed natures.

At length one day, a month after Mr. M'Intyre's death, Mrs. Stanley and Julia were admitted; they had called to inquire for her in passing, but without any expectation of an interview.

Aurora's heart was very full, for, charitably forgetting all she knew of the shallow character of the new-made

widow, she had, in imagination, transferred to her the utter desolation which would have been her own under similar circumstances. It was something of a shock then to find Mrs. M'Intyre simply what she had always been,—all her thoughts and feelings centering in herself as usual.

'It is very kind of you to come,' she said, when her visitors were seated; 'you don't think I ought to have refused you any longer?'

Startled by the question, Aurora replied, 'Certainly not; I think feeling is the only true guide in such matters; and when would the presence of friends be so naturally desired as at a time of sorrow and trial?'

'I am very glad you don't regard it as an impropriety; it is so depressing to be alone day after day, and Hector is so melancholy.'

'It is a sad loss to him,' Aurora ventured to observe.

'Yes, but he does not seem to realize that my loss is much greater. People should not allow their own sorrow to make them selfish; but he never thinks of me,—no one does now.' And Mrs. M'Intyre put her handkerchief to her eyes and sobbed hysterically, during which process Julia escaped from the room.

Aurora was utterly at a loss what to say. Real deep sorrow she could have met with womanly sympathy,

and with words of Christian consolation. But what comfort could she offer to a woman in such a frame of mind, whose very mourning was only another phase of self-worship and self-indulgence?

While she sat in silence Mrs. M'Intyre's grief exhausted itself.

'Dear Mrs. Stanley,' she said, 'forgive me for being so easily overcome, but my whole nervous system has received such a shock. My poor dear husband' (which, she did not specify) 'used to say I was far too sensitive to bear the trials of a lonely life. But I will not speak of myself. May I ask you to do me a great favour?'

Aurora replied that she would be happy to be of any service, and Mrs. M'Intyre left the room. She returned immediately with a bonnet in her hand.

'I think I might go to church next Sunday; I feel as if I should die imprisoned here any longer, but I cannot wear this bonnet. See what a fright it is!'

'I daresay the milliner will alter it if you will tell me what you wish done.'

'It is this horrible widow's cap; I never used to wear them made in that way; it is too stiff and heavy. Don't you think she could put in a lighter one? This is so wretchedly unbecoming; I could not endure to be seen in such a thing.'

Aurora was almost speechless with horror; but the unfortunate bonnet was not the cause. She did manage to say she would get the cap exchanged; and unfastening it from the bonnet, she bade adieu, Mrs. M'Intyre begging her to come again soon, and declaring the visit had done her a world of good.

Julia was waiting at the gate, out of hearing of the house; her first remark was—

'It is useless to talk of being in love and charity with your neighbours so long as that execrable woman is one of them.'

'My dear child,' said Aurora sadly, 'I think pity is the only emotion she should excite. And yet it is impossible not to blush for our common human nature so degraded.'

'How do you think Hector M'Intyre endures his life in such society?' asked Julia.

'I am sure I don't know.'

'Neither do I; but of one thing I am certain: no vows or promises to the living or the dead could ever bind me to live in the house with that woman. What a purgatory it must be!'

And Julia, speaking in an excited and determined tone, was overheard by Hector himself, as he was passing through the wood beside which their path lay.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NEED OF PATIENCE.

THE summer wore on. July came; and before it passed away there fell upon the waiting hearts in a thousand homes the first terrible blow, the defeat at Bull Run. Afterwards it was acknowledged as a salutary lesson, one that could scarcely have been spared; but at the time it was a bitter disappointment to a people exultingly confident of immediate success, and in whose vocabulary the word *disaster* had found as yet no place. Stunned and overwhelmed for a moment, the nation soon aroused itself to the exercise of the patient endurance, the resolute perseverance, which were to take the place of the eager and passionate enthusiasm of the first days of the war. The magnitude of the work was understood at length, the cost counted, the choice deliberately made; and thenceforward no losses and no temporary defeats were to shake the steadfast determination to conquer in the end.

In the pleasant summer evening, the members of the

choir were assembled at the old house on the hill; Aurora was at the piano, and the two girls, with their father, Hector M'Intyre, and three or four others, were practising the chants and hymns for the following Sunday—when a neighbour, passing by, stopped to tell the disastrous news. There was no more music that night.

Julia burst into tears, regardless of every one around her—Julia, who had been of the opinion that anything was preferable to a war, but who was now the strongest advocate for its vigorous prosecution.

'Papa, I will not believe it!' she exclaimed; 'it cannot, it *shall* not be true.'

Alas, there was no room for doubt; and as the details were given, she looked up with her face stained with crying, and said passionately—

'The misery of the thing is the being compelled to sit here and fold one's hands. My heart is breaking to be in the midst of it.'

The next moment, as she saw the reflection of the same feeling in Hector M'Intyre's face, she would fain have recalled her words had it been possible.

Aurora, pale and faint with excitement, looked up to her husband as he stood beside her—

'Hugh, I could find it in my heart to say, "Go."'

But he laid his hand upon her head and stroked caressingly the bright brown hair.

'Not yet, Aurora; the time has not yet come.'

And she knew that her sacrifice was only postponed, not withheld.

To May the sad tidings brought at first a shock, then came a feeling of intense thankfulness that Henry's regiment had not been there; but soon there rose up in her foolish little heart a conviction that if it had been, the result would have been different. Very early the little party separated; the grief and disappointment were too deep to find relief in words.

But for Hector M'Intyre there was a new trial in store, in the open exultation of his stepmother, whose Southern sympathies were now freely expressed. 'It served them right; they had no business invading the South, and she always knew how it would end. For her part, she did not wonder that the Southern people were sick and tired of such a union, being themselves a so much nobler race.' Poor silly creature, mistaking the glitter for the gold, and blind to the true nobility with which she came in daily contact.

And was it for this woman that Hector was sacrificing the desire of his soul in refraining from the work to which his country called her sons? No, surely not

for her sake, but in obedience to a higher principle, that he might be able to meet his father in the last day, saying to him, 'I have been faithful to my trust.' An exaggerated idea of duty and of honour it might seem to some people, but to him it was the plain and simple path of rectitude, from which he could not swerve without sinning against his own soul.

'Gentle with her,' for the sake of the old man who was gone, patient and forbearing, thoughtful of her comfort, though expecting nothing in return, kind to the spoilt children, who, by dint of injudicious petting at one time, and equally injudicious severity at another, were rapidly becoming as disagreeable inmates of a house as one can well imagine, he was bearing his daily cross patiently, unmurmuring.

Those dark days passed by. And at length Westfield's three months' volunteers came home without having seen a day's fighting. They marched back into the town (not one missing) to receive a perfect ovation at the hands of the citizens, and to the looker-on it might have seemed that this was merely playing at war. The tears and sighs, the sad forebodings of the last May might have looked ridiculous in the light of this result, yet they were not so, for there had been the offering of the will, the essence of all true self-sacrifice.

Sterner work was at hand. Few of these young men returned to remain at home. Here and there was one, faint-hearted, whose experience of camp-life had chilled the ardour of his patriotism, but such were the exceptions; the large majority were ready to volunteer again. Not this time in a body, to march out of the town in their distinctive dress, with flags flying and music sounding, and hearts beating high with confidence of unfaltering success, but one at a time, or in twos and threes, to go quietly away, to be lost sight of in some regiment known only by its number, to don the sober serviceable blue of the regulation uniform, for work and not for show, and to know for a certainty that no ninety days would see the Herculean labour accomplished.

The time spent at home by Henry Alston was not a little trying to Virginia, for now came the realization of the practical effect of his engagement. She was no longer first in his thoughts; precious hours that once would have been hers were now given to May Stanley; the little childlike creature who had so lately learned to love him had become the centre of his world. Of course Virginia, like any other well-principled woman, acknowledged that this was all right, and just as it should be. She scolded and lectured herself for ever feeling neglected, and when she was in a reasonable

mood confessed that Henry was very good and unselfish, May not at all exacting. But Virginia was only a mortal woman, Henry had been her idol, and she could not resign him to any one else without a pang. The old comfort and satisfaction in having him all to herself could never come again, and so it was that his second departure was not nearly so grievous to his sister as the first had been, while to poor little May it was much worse. Aurora thought the parting of the lovers this time decidedly more in keeping with their relation to each other, and was convinced that she had been right about the correspondence. It was early autumn when Henry Alston joined the new regiment in which he was to take his old rank as captain of a company; and when he bade his mother good-bye, she laid her trembling hands upon his head and blessed him, with the firm conviction that she should see his face no more.

Frederick Osborne did not go again at once: he intended to, so he said, he was fully determined that he would, but week after week and month after month he lingered on, partly from a natural infirmity of purpose, which made it difficult for him to do anything to which he was not driven by the force of outward circumstances, and partly because there was a new attraction for him in Westfield. There were whispers that he was

a very frequent visitor at the old house on the hill, and insinuations that there must be some greater charm there than was to be found in the society of Mr. Stanley and his wife. May, conscious of the security of her own position, smiled in quiet scorn when such things were hinted in her presence; Julia, with hot indignation, wished that people would mind their own business, and not couple her name with that of a fop like Fred Osborne.

But that young gentleman was not one to take a delicate hint, and he persisted in his visits, quite unconscious of the fact, which might have been obvious to a less self-confident nature, that they were not particularly acceptable, and frequently very *mal-à-propos.* Aurora, out of consideration for Julia, would often remain in the parlour when she would fain have been excused from the effort of entertaining company; and poor Julia was wretched in the thought of mamma's discomfort.

'If he is determined to make a fool of himself,' said Mr. Stanley one day to his wife, 'I don't see that any rule of Christian charity requires you to prevent him.'

But Aurora thought it did, for Julia's sake.

At last a happy expedient suggested itself, and the next time the unwelcome visitor called, he was shown

into the parlour, where he was received by Mr. Stanley alone, who apologized for the ladies not making their appearance, on the ground that Mrs. Stanley was not very well.

Poor Fred was extremely sorry,—no doubt of that,—and very soon took his departure. When his next visit was attended with a similar result, a ray of light seemed to dawn upon his mind, and he wisely resolved to give up calling for the present.

One morning in the beginning of winter, the sunlight falling in at the windows of the breakfast-room, shone upon an unusual sight; the regular order and punctuality of the household had evidently received a check, for the hands of the clock on the mantelpiece showed that the breakfast hour had long gone by, yet there was the table ready set for the morning meal, and the snowy array of cups and plates was quite undisturbed. The wood-fire was blazing cheerily, and beside it sat May, trying to occupy herself with a piece of knitting; while Julia was fussing about the room, in a way that would have been distracting to a nervous person,—now drawing down the window-blind, then sending it up with a jerk, picking up a book, to lay it down the next moment, fidgeting with the vases of dried grasses and autumn leaves. At last she spied the calendar with yesterday's

date remaining unaltered, and seizing upon it as a prize, she sent all the cards in a shower upon the carpet. She was still engaged in gathering them up when the door opened, and Dr. Bartlett's cheerful voice announced—

'Well, young ladies, I have great news for you—there is a little brother apiece for you up-stairs.'

'Uncle Arthur! twin babies—oh, how glorious!' And Julia sprang up and clasped her hand in an ecstasy, while May only said, looking anxiously into the doctor's face, 'And mamma?'

'Mamma is as well as possible, and very happy and proud of her sons.'

'Oh, isn't it splendid, May?' said her sister; 'we will never need to quarrel over the baby.'

'No, indeed,' laughingly replied Dr. Bartlett, 'you can both play the nurse to your hearts' content.'

'Won't we though? And oh, may we not go up and see them?'

'Yes, if you will promise not to go like a whirlwind, and to remember that you are restricted to five minutes, for I really want my breakfast, Julia.'

'I promise to be as quiet as a mouse, or as May,—a stronger comparison still.'

Away they went, Julia to make a rush at the babies

as soon as she entered the door; while May's first impulse was to steal up to Aurora, and bending down to kiss her again and again, as she whispered softly, and with tears in her eyes, 'Dear, dear mamma, I am so glad!' after which she too was quite ready to go into raptures over the tiny little creatures. Julia's descent to the dining-room justified the wisdom of Dr. Bartlett's previous warning, and caused her father to tell May to take the place at the head of the table, as he was quite sure the coffee would otherwise be poured upon the floor, and not into the cups; at which Julia professed herself highly insulted.

'Papa, it is really too bad, and before Uncle Arthur too. The fact is, I am the only person in the house in a proper frame of mind; the rest of you are provokingly indifferent, and if you don't get up a little more enthusiasm, I will take possession of both the babies and let you have nothing to do with them.'

'For how long?' asked the doctor.

'Uncle Arthur, you too! I thought you would have taken my part and that of your nephews.'

'Honestly, Julia, I never thought of them in that light before.'

'And no wonder,' said May, 'such tiny little atoms as they are.'

'Atoms indeed! that is as much as you know about it,' answered the doctor indignantly, as if his reputation were involved in such a charge; 'they are remarkably large fine boys.'

'Comparatively, I suppose,' said Julia; 'but how nice it is that they are so much alike, it will be delightful never to know them apart; and oh, papa, about their names.'

Dr. Bartlett suggested 'Castor and Pollux;' May, 'Hugh and Arthur,' but Mr. Stanley answered—

'You are both too late; that question is settled; George and Edward they are to be, for my father and Aurora's.'

And so it was fixed.

The mother and the babies improved day by day, and very soon Aurora was back again in her old place; but with a new light in her beautiful eyes, and a new charm in air and manner, as her husband thought; and his daughters quite agreed with him in his opinion.

'Mamma is lovelier than ever,' said May on the first evening that she spent down-stairs, and Julia replied, 'My dear, you are very dull to have taken so long to make the discovery; I knew it the minute she entered the room.'

It was not, however, an unshadowed joy that filled Aurora's heart, as day by day she watched the unfolding of the two little buds intrusted to her care. Ever before her eyes there was the gathering cloud that was yet to shut out the sunshine of her home.

The old house was full of new life; the two lovely boys, the admiration of all beholders, were the pride and joy of the whole household, every day adding to their intelligence, and, to Julia's great delight, taking away nothing from their exact likeness to each other. No stranger could detect the slightest difference between them, and when only one was in the room, Aurora alone could tell whether it were George or Eddie. So things went on till they were six months old. Then came the long-dreaded day. A new call for troops, a new outburst of military ardour among the people, and more than ever the need realized of men really fitted for such a position, taking the command of the new regiments.

Hugh Stanley had been no idle looker-on. Ever keeping in view the work that might be demanded of him, he had been labouring to fit himself for it, and to put his farm in such order that it might be left to another's care. And at last the hour came when, with an almost breaking heart, Aurora bade him go.

'I will not hold you back, my husband; the country has need of all her sons, and chiefly of her noblest and best.'

And he answered, holding her close to his heart—

'My darling, I trust it is not presumptuous, but I feel a strong faith that I shall come back to you, kept safe by God's protection, guarded by your prayers. But if not—'

She stopped him before the words were spoken.

'Hugh, I cannot bear it; do not speak of that.'

'Aurora mia, it is best to say it, and cannot make any difference in the result. If not, neither life nor death, neither time nor eternity, can come between us, or touch our deathless love.'

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN'S PORTION OF THE WORK.

AURORA'S laudable efforts to keep matters from coming to a crisis between Julia and Frederick Osborne were entirely thrown away, for that young gentleman was possessed of a very high estimate of his own attractions, and would not believe, unless upon a statement from headquarters, that his case was hopeless. His mind once made up, an opportunity was not wanting, and accordingly Julia was waylaid one afternoon as she was returning alone from a shopping excursion in the town.

The curt reply to his salutation might have acted as a warning to any one whose self-love was less strongly developed, but it had no effect upon him.

'A very pleasant afternoon for a walk, Miss Julia.'

'Very,' was the short response.

'Allow me to carry that parcel for you.'

'Oh no, indeed! it is quite light; I would not take

you out of your way—thank you.' The last words suddenly suggesting themselves as quite imperative.

'It would give me great pleasure to continue my walk as far as yours extends, if you will permit me.'

No answer; Julia forgetting that silence gives consent.

'I believe Mr. Stanley leaves on Monday?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know I have almost made up my mind to try to get into his regiment; I have been at home long enough.'

'I think you have,' said Julia rather bluntly.

Her companion winced at this, but in a moment asked quite meekly, 'Then you think I ought to go?'

'Oh, I have no right to express any opinion about your duty, Mr. Osborne,'—the speaker quite unconscious of her own marvellous inconsistency;—'I only know if I were a man, in a time like this I should be found in my proper place.'

'Miss Julia,' said Frederick Osborne eagerly, 'to gain your approval I would volunteer this very day.'

'My approval is a very small affair.'

'Not to me; to me it is worth more than all the world beside.' And the ice fairly broken, he poured forth a fervent declaration of his affection.

It was very provoking, and Julia was thoroughly angry. Such a scene on the public road, where at any moment they might be met by some inquisitive neighbour! But what could she do? There was no stemming the torrent till it had exhausted itself. At length he paused; and, standing still, she drew herself up to her full height.

'Mr. Osborne, excuse me; but I cannot listen to this—'

'Only one moment, hear me for a moment,' he implored; 'I am going away, going to the war. Give me a single word of encouragement—tell me you do not despise and reject the love you have awakened. If I can prove myself worthy of you, Julia, if I can come back to lay my laurels at your feet—'

'It would be a very poor place to lay them, Mr. Osborne; I would much rather see you wear them, as you will deserve.'

And Julia would have turned coldly away; but something in the young man's expression of hopeless despondency touched her better feelings, and she held out her hand.

'I am very sorry to have given you pain. I trust you may succeed and do something worthy of yourself, —a much higher aim. You have my best wishes.'

He spoiled all by clasping the offered hand in both of his, and pressing it to his lips.

Very haughtily Julia withdrew it.

'You forget yourself, Mr. Osborne,' she said in her most icy tones, and walked away.

But the ice gave place to a fire of wrath and indignation as she hastened on her way home.

'Such insufferable conceit, such insolent presumption! And all because she had spoken a few friendly words.'

With her face in a blaze she burst in upon Aurora—

'Mamma, only think of Fred Osborne having the impudence to make love to me on the turnpike!'

It was not in human nature to avoid laughing at such an announcement, and in such terms.

'Julia, what do you mean?'

'Just what I say. On the way home he suddenly appeared, and began talking about getting into papa's regiment. I hope he will do nothing of the kind; I am sure he would be no credit to it. Then he went on with a great deal of stuff about gaining my approval and making himself worthy of me; bringing his laurels to lay at my feet. He had better win them first before he disposes of them.'

'My dear Julia,' said Aurora gravely, 'I don't think

that is the tone in which you should speak. The poor fellow undoubtedly felt and meant every word he said.'

'But, mamma, the impudence of kissing my hand!—my glove, rather. I have a great mind to burn it up.'

'Even that only proved the reality of his feeling; and —will you let me give you a little bit of advice?'

'As much as you please, mamma,' said Julia, rubbing the injured glove with her handkerchief.

'It is only that you should try to consider his real disappointment a little more seriously. When a man asks a woman to be his wife, he pays her the highest compliment in his power, and trusts to her honour not to betray his confidence.'

Julia gave her head a toss.

'I always detested compliments; but that kind is the worst of all.'

'I don't know. The sincere affection of an honourable man is not to be despised, nor looked upon as an affront, even if it is not returned.'

That Julia would make no boast of her conquest Aurora well knew; she was far above any such miserable vanity, and equally far removed from the heartlessness which can take pleasure in inflicting pain. But the true womanly nature of the stepmother had been

shocked by the whole tone of the disclosure. Had Frederick Osborne been even less worthy of the love he sought, she would have pitied and sympathized with him; and it pained her to see Julia's want of feeling. What she really feared was that the matter, so serious to him, should be lightly made the topic of household discussion. Aurora's sense of honour would have placed an inviolable seal of secrecy upon such a scene. It was Frederick Osborne's secret, and Julia had no right to disclose it; so she gave the warning that she saw was needed, and she did not give it in vain; Julia never spoke of the matter again, and only Mr. Stanley and Aurora ever knew of the offer and the rejection.

True to his resolution, the young man did volunteer again immediately, and entered Colonel Stanley's regiment; with a silent hope that so he might hear of Julia occasionally, and perhaps be kept in her remembrance. If he should distinguish himself in any way she would be sure to know it.

Another recruit for the army at the same time was Archibald Dubois, who had been roving about doing nothing for a year, and now and then making a sudden descent upon Mrs. Alston and Virginia. With the latter he carried on a constant warfare. She was very much dissatisfied with his way of life, and never hesitated to

say so; and he would defend himself and his idleness in a provokingly careless tone, which only made matters worse in Virginia's eyes. 'I hope you are satisfied now,' he said to her, when he came to show his commission and to say good-bye. 'But if I am killed you will have a pretty account to settle with my mother; it is all your doing.'

'I am only too glad to take the credit and the responsibility together,' said Virginia; 'and if you should be killed, Archie, if I were your mother I would rather have my son dead in a good cause, than living to no purpose.'

'But you are not my mother; and she has not a bit of the Spartan in her composition. She will never forgive you. However, I'll leave you to settle it with her if that contingency arises. On the other hand, Virginia, if I come home minus an arm or leg, so that no other girl will look at me, I hold you bound in honour to marry me yourself.'

'Indeed I will do no such thing; but I will tell you what I will do: I will devote myself to you in the most sisterly manner that an old maid cousin can, and take care of you to the end of the chapter.'

'A bargain! There, aunt, you are the witness.'

'However, Archie,' added Virginia, 'you need not

anticipate any such melancholy fate. If you should come home minus both arms and legs, and with only so much body left as will suffice to keep your soul attached to this nether sphere, you will find some woman to look upon you as the greatest possible prize, and to be only too happy to take possession of what there is of you left.'

'And that is your estimate of your sex?'

'Don't ask me for the reverse side of the picture. Only I will say this: I don't believe there lives the old maid who might not have been married if she liked.'

'Even yourself?'

'Even myself; have I not just had an offer?'

'Oh, to be sure; but how many more?'

'Thank you; you are not my father-confessor.'

When the day of parting came, Julia was very heroic; at last she had some one belonging to her in the army, and was equal to her neighbours, of whom she had been secretly very envious. May broke down entirely, and then was very penitent.

'Mamma,' she said, 'I am very selfish; but—' and there came out the reason why May felt, if she did not think, that she had a right to be doubly distressed—'I am giving up more than any one, papa and Henry both.'

Aurora asked herself if her husband and the father of her children were not more to her than both father and lover could be to May; but that was not a question to be put to the poor child who was kneeling beside her, with her eyes dim with tears, and her heart overburdened with a grief that seemed to her greater than any one else could know.

'My darling,' said Aurora, kissing her fondly, 'we have both given our all, and there is nothing more that we can do, except to see to it that we make a willing offering. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver."'

And a cheerful giver Aurora undoubtedly proved herself to be; something of her old gaiety was gone, but none of her steadfast cheerfulness. She went about the house with a light step, a pleasant word and smile for every one; sang to her babies, played with them, delighting in all their merry little ways, until Mrs. Bartlett was tempted to say to her husband, 'Arthur, between you and me, I think Aurora can scarcely be so desperately fond of her husband after all. If she were, she could never take his absence so coolly.'

The doctor looked at his wife without uttering a word.

'Well,' she said impatiently, 'what is it?'

'Only, Hattie, that I think your usual penetration has failed you this once.'

It was a fortunate thing for Aurora that she was too busy to find time for the indulgence of sad and anxious thoughts. Her two babies might easily have taken up all her time, then she had her household duties, which she was unwilling to resign entirely to the girls, though they were most ready and efficient assistants; and now the general oversight of the farm was added to her other cares. Each day brought its own work, and night always found her weary and ready to sleep, after commending her absent husband to His care who could keep him safe on the battle-field as in his own home. Perhaps she had something of his own strong faith that he would be preserved to return to her at last; and so heart and hope and courage kept up, nor ever failed during the months that grew into years before the end was attained.

There was another secret influence at work which she would scarcely have acknowledged to any one else, and it was this. She well knew that her husband prized above everything the cheerful brightness of her temper and disposition. Should he come back and find it gone; 'a quiet and weary woman,' worn with anxious brooding care, in the place of the 'Aurora' who had brought back to him the morning freshness of heart and life? Ah, no! that should not be; for his sake would

she keep herself unchanged, unsaddened, unsubdued, through all the days of patient waiting. And it pleased her to think that in so doing she was giving him the strongest possible proof of her love. Little it mattered to her whether other people understood her and appreciated the reason for her cheerfulness or not; it is a poor weak affection that pauses to ask what appearance it is making in other eyes; and Aurora was too deeply conscious of the conflict she was carrying on within to think of the opinions that might be formed by her neighbours; too calmly secure in the knowledge of the perfect love existing between her husband and herself, to imagine that it needed to be openly displayed. Whatever else might be doubtful in this changing and uncertain world, that at least was beyond suspicion,—beyond questioning from any source whatever.

The winter, when it came, brought with it a new and all-absorbing interest. The Sanitary Commission was demanding for the soldiers, in tent and hospital, the practical sympathy and aid of all who had willing hearts and active hands. An auxiliary society was formed in Westfield, and the work was begun in earnest. The good sense of its members was shown in the choice of Mrs. Bartlett as president; she was quite in her element overseeing and directing a host of workers

and finding a famous field for the display of her peculiar talents. Order and system ruled with a rod of iron in all the transactions of the society, and none of its members dared to be idle or careless with the fear of the doctor's wife before their eyes. Emily Osborne was in great delight at being appointed treasurer, and determined to prove herself worthy of the honour so bestowed upon her. It was a fortunate choice, for in her hands the funds were constantly and mysteriously increasing. If any one asked questions she replied by a reference to her books, kept with elaborate neatness and precision, in 'the microscopic hand' which gave such offence to Virginia Alston; and there would be found entered, 'Donation, $20;' 'From a friend, $10,' and so on from time to time, but no further explanation was forthcoming. How many little acts of self-denial these sums represented no one knew save Emily herself; but no new bonnet and cloak had ever given her half the satisfaction she felt in wearing her old ones of the former winter, with the consciousness that in so doing she was able to give something of her own to the society's funds.

Mrs. Bartlett, who would have liked to fill the office of 'keeper of the conscience' to all her relations, was decidedly of opinion that Aurora should not become a

working member of the society, as she had quite enough to do at home.

'No one has enough to do while he or she can find time to do something more,' said Aurora. 'I shall not neglect my babies, Harriet, because I give one afternoon in the week to such an imperative duty.'

According to the good old primitive custom, which the necessities of modern city life are rapidly making a thing of the past, the inhabitants of Westfield made the principal meal of the day at one o'clock; the wave of ultimate civilisation not having reached the quiet little town, effacing old footprints and landmarks, and bringing in the tide of eager business life, to which all else must give way.

By two o'clock, or shortly after, on any Wednesday afternoon, the interior of the Court-house presented a most unusual appearance. Its ordinary occupants had vanished, and with them all signs of the normal uses of the building. A large table stood in the centre of the room, covered with garments made and unmade, and materials for work of all kinds and descriptions; and there stood Mrs. Bartlett in her glory, issuing her orders and superintending the distribution of the work. In different parts of the large room three or four sewing-machines were being used by their owners, who had

had them brought from the neighbouring houses; and busy fingers were cutting-out, folding hems, preparing seams, or finishing off the parts which needed the final touch of a skilful hand. The rapid click of the machinery, the cheerful hum of forty or fifty voices, gave forth the sound of a hive of bees; while the workers need not have been put to shame even by those model labourers.

'An immense deal of gossip must go on there,' said some of the wise men of the town; but it was an innocent kind of gossip after all, there being no absentees to be talked about, and the war furnishing a never-failing topic of conversation.

But the sewing-circle was only one branch of the work undertaken by the ladies of Westfield; Mr. Osborne had placed at their disposal a large room, in which were collected offerings of a miscellaneous order, to be added to the stores of the Sanitary Commission; and it was filled and emptied and filled again with marvellous celerity. Nothing came amiss; there was a use found for everything; and the farmer in gathering in the fruits of the earth, the careful housekeeper in laying up her store, remembered the sick and wounded soldiers, and laid aside a portion for them. Busiest of all busy agents in this work of collecting was Julia

Stanley, who declared herself ready at all times to beg, borrow, or steal in behalf of any one wearing a blue jacket; until Aurora laughingly avowed that she grudged the use of everything beyond the bare necessaries of life to the members of their own household.

'Just a few of those dried peaches,' she would plead; 'they say the poor fellows in the hospitals are so glad to get them, and ours are so much nicer than any you can buy. We can do without them quite well;' and the peaches would disappear, to be followed by something else next week, something absolutely necessary to the comfort of the soldiers, but quite needless to the people at home.

No very active part could Virginia Alston take in the work, which had yet her hearty sympathy; for her mother's health was rapidly failing, and she was now confined entirely to her own room. Real suffering in any one dependent upon her aroused all the better part of Virginia's nature, her brusque imperative manner was wonderfully softened, and her patient kindness was inexhaustible. Day and night she watched over the invalid with a reversal of their former relation; the mother was now the object of unwearied care and tenderness, the child bestowed it as heartily as it had

been given to her in the days of her infancy and helplessness.

As long as Mrs. Alston could sit up, even in her bed, her hands were busy knitting socks and comforters for the soldiers; she could forget herself in her interest in them, and such light labours of love beguiled the tedium of many an otherwise weary hour.

Emily Osborne was a frequent visitor to the sick-room, coming in with some little offering of flowers or fruit, or any delicacy which she fancied might be tempting to the invalid; and the sight of her bright face seemed to Mrs. Alston like a ray of sunshine. Virginia, not yet entirely free of her old suspicion, felt called upon to give Emily a hint of the state of matters between Henry and May Stanley, lest she should be building up any false hopes of reaching the son's heart through the mother.

Emily's face glowed with most unmistakable pleasure.

'Oh, Virginia, I am so glad, so very glad, to know that any good came of my birthday party; ever since Mr. M'Intyre died I have hated to think of it.'

'Nonsense,' said Virginia, 'don't begin to go through the world burdening yourself with all the sins and follies of your neighbours, or you will soon find yourself crushed to death.'

'No, I shall not do that, but it was the chief association with that night. Now I shall think, instead, of May's happiness; I can't tell you how glad I am.'

And Virginia, looking into the clear truthful eyes, confessed inwardly that she was a little, a very little, ashamed of herself.

There came a day at last when Mrs. Alston's unfinished piece of knitting was laid aside to be taken up no more; when the blinds were drawn down, and the single watcher in her room moved cautiously and lightly, and refused admission to every friend except the minister and Emily—Emily, 'the little butterfly,' who came so softly and brightly into the darkened chamber, as to prove the fitness of the appellation. The dim eyes always brightened at her appearance, and the daily visit was continued to the end, Mrs. Alston finding in Emily something to supply the want in Virginia's character, where there was plenty of solid strength, but little of grace or delicate beauty.

Henry could not come home, and the mother's prophecy was fulfilled; she passed away without seeing him again, leaving her last message of love and blessing to be given him by another.

Quietly and systematically Virginia made all the necessary arrangements, offered the house for rent, and

went to stay with the Stanleys for a time, until she should regain the strength taxed by her long watching and care.

'I have found my mission,' she said to Aurora, 'it lies most evidently in the sick-room. Nothing so subdues my impracticable temper as having to do with people who are dependent on me, and too weak to oppose me. I shall offer myself for duty in the hospitals.'

The necessary preliminaries being submitted to, she was accepted, and appointed to a charge in the south-west. It was something of a disappointment, for she would have preferred the east, to be near the army of the Potomac, 'in case of anything happening to Henry,' she said.

May's face lost every particle of colour at the bare suggestion of such a possibility.

'My dear child,' said Virginia, 'it is better to look such things fairly in the face; it adds nothing to their probability, and makes them easier to bear if they come.'

But May's philosophy was of a different kind, like that of the birds of the air, taking no thought for the morrow.

After one expression of regret that she had not been sent to Washington, Virginia submitted cheerfully.

'In the army, the first duty is unquestioning obedience,' she said, 'and now that I am in the service of the Government, it will never do to set an example of insubordination.'

So she bade adieu to home and friends, and went out to do her part; to do it nobly and well, infusing something of her own energy and earnestness into all the details of the management of the hospital, and becoming daily more gentle and tender, and true of heart through constant ministry to the sick and suffering.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

MOST trying of all were the days immediately following the telegraphic announcement of a battle, before the details were given which were to bring joy or despair to many a fireside. The agony of suspense—the only unbearable pain, because the only one for which there is no solace—came to the little household on the hill at such times, in whatever quarter the conflict might have taken place; for Colonel Stanley's regiment was in the south-west, and Henry Alston's with the army of the Potomac. Again and again the cloud came, but it always lightened, for a time at least, leaving only thanksgiving when it had passed away. Two or three times gaining a short leave of absence, Hugh Stanley came home, to bring to Aurora for a few days, and to realize for himself, an intensity of happiness which almost made amends for the long weary separation.

It was on one of those occasions that Julia received from her father the sternest rebuke she had had for many a day. Speaking of his regiment, she said—

'I only wish, papa, your own town were more creditably represented; Fred Osborne will never reflect any honour either upon you or Westfield.'

'Let me never hear you speak in that tone again, Julia,' replied her father with severity. 'You know nothing of what you are saying. There is not a young man in the regiment more true to every duty than Frederick Osborne, not one in whom I would place more implicit confidence; and I will not have such remarks go forth from any member of my family to wound the feelings of his friends, or to cast a suspicion upon his character.'

Julia was silenced, and when Colonel Stanley returned to his command, he took occasion frequently to mention Frederick Osborne, and in terms which filled Emily with delight when they were repeated to her, and caused Mrs. Osborne to hold her head higher than ever.

Many a heart has reason to remember the battle fought at Murfreesborough, Tennessee, in that second winter of the war. Tidings of it came to Westfield, awakening the most fearful anxiety in more than one

household. Aurora scarcely knew how she lived during the long weary hours while she waited for the details, which should bring to her joy or grief beyond all telling; for her husband's regiment was there in the midst of the fight. Slowly the moments crept by; but at last there was a sharp quick ring at the door, and a telegram was placed in her hand. One wordless prayer for strength to endure whatever it might bring; she opened it, and her eye fell first of all upon the signature, 'Hugh Stanley.'

He was safe; for a moment she cared to know no more. The blessed assurance from himself was enough, far more than enough, to fill her heart with thankfulness and joy.

But when she took up the paper that had fallen from her hand, she started in sudden recoil from the very thought of her own happiness. Alas for those to whom there would come no such tidings, whose hopes and fears alike must be silenced by the certainty of loss. There, in the little message which had brought her relief from all her suspense, followed these words—'Osborne was instantly killed on the first day, while most gallantly leading on his men. Tell his mother.'

No room for doubt, no room for hope; the brief, terrible statement lay before her, and with it the task

from which she would gladly have escaped. How could she go to another woman—she whom God had spared in the very same hour—and tell her that her first-born, the pride of her heart, lay dead upon the field of battle, killed in the early morning of his life? For a moment it seemed impossible to carry her own rejoicing into the presence of such a woe. Then she rebuked herself for the feeling, and hastened on her sad errand, lest by any chance some cold hard announcement in a newspaper paragraph should give the first tidings of his death with an added shock to those who loved him. Before she could ring Mr. Osborne's bell, Emily opened the door. 'Dear Mrs. Stanley,' she said, 'I saw you coming, and I am so glad to meet you. We have been very anxious, and I am sure you have too; but I do think all must be well now as we have heard nothing.'

The pleading eyes lifted to hers, and half full of tears, broke down all Aurora's fortitude, and she turned away, in momentary shrinking from the inevitable destruction of that last trembling hope.

'Is your mother at home?' she asked, after an instant of silence.

'Yes, but she has one of her nervous headaches, and has gone to bed.'

'Then, Emily, my dear child, it is to you I must tell the sad tidings I have received—'

'Not of my brother; oh, Mrs. Stanley, not of my brother!' exclaimed the poor girl with passionate entreaty, as though upon Aurora's next words his fate depended.

Very tenderly the words were spoken, as Aurora drew the slight trembling figure close to her; but no tenderness, no sympathy of human friend, could break the force of the terrible blow.

'Your brother has given his life for his country.'

There was one low heart-broken cry, 'O Fred! my brother, my brother!' and Emily laid her head upon Aurora's breast, and they wept together in silence.

She started up at length. 'Mother must not know; I must keep it from her to-night.' And the strong effort to regain her composure touched Aurora even more than the first outbreak of her sorrow; for the tears would gather in the blue eyes, the sweet child-like lips quivered as she spoke. It was a hard struggle, but the loving little heart conquered at last for the mother's sake; and Mrs. Stanley turned to leave her, realizing something of the strength hidden under that sunny nature which had seemed unfit for the real trials of life.

There was nothing more to do except to repeat the very words of the telegram; believing that there would be found some comfort in the knowledge they conveyed, and Emily looked up with a sudden gleam of light in her eyes.

'I knew it,' she said proudly, 'I knew that he would be noble and true to the end, my own dear brother.' And again the little head was bowed down, to be lifted at the sound of her father's voice.

'I will tell him,' she whispered; and Aurora slipped away unseen.

It was a sad walk home, contrasting her own happiness with the sorrow she had left behind her, realizing the imminent danger ever surrounding her husband. This one escape gave no assurance of future safety; and the peril seemed now greater than ever, since one had fallen who had been so intimately connected with him.

For the strong young life cut down in an instant too she sorrowed, for all the fearful suffering caused by the war; and from her heart, as from how many others, arose the cry, 'Lord, how long?'

Ah, this was but the beginning; patience was yet to have her perfect work, through days and weeks, through months, and even years; until at last the victory attained should be received with souls chas-

tened and subdued, ready to acknowledge the righteousness of the chastisement, and to give all the praise to Him who had brought light out of darkness, and good from evil.

At the door May came out to meet Aurora, with strange perplexity in face and manner.

'Mamma, will you go up to Julia? she is crying so terribly. Do you think—' and a deep blush suffused her face—'is it possible that she cared for him?'

'No, dear,' said Aurora, 'it is not that.'

Julia was indeed in a state of sad distress and self-reproach, the latter exaggerated in her usual impetuous manner; but Aurora did not attempt to do away with it altogether, believing that this might prove a salutary lesson.

'O mamma!' she exclaimed, 'to think of the things I have said of him, and he dying so nobly; I will never forgive myself—never.'

Gently but authoritatively Aurora insisted upon helping her to bed, for she had cried herself into a fever, and her head was aching violently. Then sitting down beside her, she bathed the throbbing temples, and spoke words of gentle soothing and sympathy.

'If there were only anything that I could do,' said Julia, 'anything to make reparation.'

And Aurora answered gravely: 'My dear child, the worst punishment of our faults is often found in the impossibility of undoing their effects.'

'I am glad you do not tell me not to mind, mamma; it is a comfort to have you understand me. But I wonder that you do not all hate me as I hate myself, for the mischief I do with my tongue.'

'In this case, Julia, there is no great mischief done, for nothing you have said has passed beyond ourselves; the wrong was rather in the hasty and severe judgment.'

'Yes, and now to think that he can never know how sorry I am. Mamma, I wish you would tell May, she does not understand; and yet it would serve me right if she should think, if every one should think—.' And there Julia stopped.

'No,' said Aurora, 'there is no need for any such self-punishment; I will tell her. And now you must try to go to sleep.'

Down-stairs she went to explain the whole story to May; but she found Hector M'Intyre in the parlour; he had heard a rumour, and had come over to inquire the truth in regard to it. After a little he asked for Julia.

'She has a violent headache, and has gone to bed,' said May.

Something in the expression of Hector's face compelled Aurora to explain; for she hated all misunderstandings and misconceptions, and would never be a party to anything of the kind, even by her silence.

'The truth is,' she said, 'Julia has made herself sick by her distress at this sad news; she is grieving over her own injustice to poor Fred, and the habit she had of laughing at him, and prophesying that he would run away from the first real battle.'

'O mamma,' said tender-hearted little May, 'I am sure she did not mean it; she would not have said it to any one but ourselves.'

'No; but she is right to regret it, and she cannot help feeling very sadly the mistaken estimate she formed of him, now that he is gone, and she can offer no reparation.'

'It does honour to her kindness of heart,' said Hector M'Intyre, and thenceforth Julia stood even higher in his estimation. Grave, quiet, undemonstrative himself, there was a great charm for him in a character whose faults were all those of an impetuous temper, and whose repentance was not less sudden and violent. A week later and a letter came from Colonel Stanley, giving a fuller account of the death of Frederick Osborne, and with it many little details of the last few

months of his life, proving that the character of the young soldier had been gradually and surely developing in the nobleness and self-devotion which had made his death honourable; and poor little Emily's tears were not the first that were wept over it.

The fiery test had been applied, the dross had been consumed, the true gold had been seen at last; and thenceforward Fred Osborne was remembered in Westfield, not as one of the idle young gallants of the days before the war, but as one of the heroes who had given their lives in a sacred cause, and whose noble self-sacrifice should not have been in vain.

The very next Wednesday Emily was in her place when the sewing-circle met; and many eyes filled with tears as she came in in her deep mourning, and with the sunny smile gone from the pale sorrowful face. Very quietly and resolutely she went through the routine of her duties. As she was going home Mrs. Stanley met her, and stopping to speak to her, she said—

'Dear Emily, I am afraid this has been too much for you.'

But the answer came quickly, with a half-suppressed sob—

'O no, do not say that; I did it for his sake.'

CHAPTER X.

THE SUMMONS TO THE HOSPITAL.

'WELL, I don't like it, and cannot think it is right. I am just as loyal as anybody, and hope and trust the rebellion will be put down; but this forcing people into the army against their will savours too much of the tyranny of the old-world governments to suit my republican notions.'

So said Mrs. Bartlett, with the air of one announcing the final end of a controversy. She was spending the evening with Aurora; and her husband, Hector M'Intyre, and his stepmother, were also of the party.

'I quite agree with you,' said the latter, 'and if I were a man, if I did not go to the war of my own free will I would not go at all.'

'And suppose you were drafted, what would you do about it?' asked Julia.

Mrs. M'Intyre vouchsafed no reply.

The doctor laid down a paper he had been glancing over.

'I am always sorry to differ from the ladies,' he said; 'but my view is this—Every citizen owes military duty to his Government when it is required of him. He may have no taste for a military life, and may not choose voluntarily to take up arms, but if the time comes when he is absolutely needed, I hold that he has no right to refuse.'

'Just what I have always said!' exclaimed Julia; 'people have no claim to the protection of a Government who will not come to its defence in time of danger.'

'Do you mean to say nobody is exempted, then?' asked Mrs. Bartlett.

'No, I do not mean that,' replied her husband; 'there may be many circumstances which make it a man's duty to remain at home. In such cases the provision of a substitute is both lawful and right.'

'An easy loop-hole of escape for cowards,' sneered Mrs. M'Intyre.

'The cowards are much better at home,' said the doctor, 'but I don't think any large proportion of our population deserves the epithet.'

'Then you are driven to my position, that the war is becoming very unpopular?'

'I am not so sure of that; many causes operate now to diminish the number of volunteers.'

'Oh, I dare say; but that is the real one. The people are getting discouraged; and you had better give it up gracefully, Dr. Bartlett, while you can; it is better than being forced to do it at last.'

'We will never give it up, madam,' said the doctor, and he turned away and changed the topic of conversation.

Two days later, Aurora and the girls were going into town, when they met Mrs. M'Intyre taking a walk.

'Have you heard the news?' she asked, stopping them with a face full of amusement.

'No, what is it?'

'Hector is drafted!' And she burst into a laugh.

No one joined her. Aurora only said, 'Indeed!'

'Yes; but he is not going—oh no! Talking about the carrying on the war is one thing, risking your own life is another.'

'Mrs. M'Intyre—' Aurora began, but she was interrupted.

'Oh, I know, Mrs. Stanley, Hector is one of your pets; but I know him a little better than you do, and I am not surprised. I assure you I have had my laugh out.'

'Come, May,' said Julia, leaving Aurora alone to hear the rest of the sentence.

'I asked him what he was going to do, and he said, "To find a substitute." "And why don't you go yourself?" said I. "This is the time to show your patriotism." He looked abashed at that, almost too much so to answer; but presently he said, "For the same reason that I did not volunteer a year ago." "Want of will or want of courage?" I asked, but he was gone. It is the best joke I have known for a long time.'

Aurora was too indignant to keep silence.

'Is it possible you understand him so little, Mrs. M'Intyre? do you really not know what it is that keeps him at home?'

'I? I know of nothing but his own pleasure.'

'Then I shall tell you; it is the promise he gave to his dying father, in my husband's presence, that he would not leave you. I think it is time for you to know it if you have been unable to make the discovery for yourself.'

'Oh, I assure you there is more than that to account for it; he is not so fond of me as to give up anything for my sake. But if that were it, I should be only too glad to know that I am doing so much for the right cause—keeping back one of those who wish to trample upon the Southern people.'

'Good-morning,' said Aurora, and she walked away, feeling that in telling such a woman of Hector's real motives, she had been casting pearls before swine.

And Mrs. M'Intyre went home to inform Hector at dinner that those Stanleys were really becoming insufferable, and she meant to have nothing more to do with them. The effect upon him was to send him over to Mrs. Stanley's the same evening.

Aurora took an opportunity of speaking to him alone.

'Hector,' she said, 'I am afraid I have been guilty of an impertinence, and I wish to make confession. I was tempted this morning to tell Mrs. M'Intyre what I know of the true and honourable motive that holds you back from entering the army.'

The young man's dark face glowed with a deeper colour.

'Thank you, Mrs. Stanley,' he said warmly, 'I know how kindly it was meant; but the friends whose opinion I really value understand, and that is quite enough.'

'And you are not angry with me?'

'Angry! far from it. I can never tell you what this house has been to me, what a debt of gratitude I owe you.'

This from Hector M'Intyre, who rarely spoke of him-

self at all. It touched Aurora very deeply, but she only said—

'As to gratitude, Hector, it is easy to discover on which side the debt is due. A pretty piece of work I would have made of my farming without your aid and counsel! I was just wishing to see you; do tell me what you think it would be best to do with the five-acre lot?'

And when the girls made their appearance, mamma and her ally were deep in an agricultural discussion.

So the days went on. It would be weary work to follow step by step all the hopes and fears, the successes and failures of those four eventful years; but each one made its mark, and left its indelible impress upon the characters of those whose deepest interests were concerned.

With double longing Hector M'Intyre looked forward to the end, for the country's sake and for his own; for then he might hope to be free from the chain that bound him.

Mrs. M'Intyre declared that she could not stand the cold climate and cold hearts of the North, and avowed her intention of returning to her old home in Alabama 'as soon as the Confederacy should have established its independence;' and although Hector never anticipated

that event, he still hoped that she might carry out her intention, when it should be demonstrated that such a result was impossible. Till then no one but himself knew how needful was the care he bestowed, and the restraining influence he exercised over the weak and foolish woman who had been intrusted to his charge. Flippantly as she could talk of Hector, she yet respected him, and guided her conduct with reference to his opinion; otherwise the quiet community of Westfield would have been scandalized far more frequently and more deeply by the light behaviour of the young widow. Through whatever suffering to himself, Hector M'Intyre was fulfilling his trust, and guarding his father's memory and his honour; and in the approval of his own conscience he found his reward.

For three years had the war been going on; the spring had returned again, and one bright May morning Julia entered the parlour singing as was her wont when she was going about her household tasks. The words were sad, but the tones of her voice scarcely showed that her heart entered very deeply into the sentiment of the song—

> 'Many are the hearts that are weary to-night,
> Wishing for the war to cease.'

'O Julia—' There was a half-suppressed sob with

the exclamation of entreaty from the window where May was sitting, and then her work fell from her hands, and covering her face, she burst into tears.

Julia threw herself on her knees beside her.

'May, my darling sister, May, I did not mean it; I did not know you were there. Don't cry so. It was horrid and wicked of me not to think. Please don't, darling.'

But the composure once lost was not easily regained, and May wept with a violence that was almost alarming in one who was generally so calm and patient. In vain Julia tried to soothe her, and offered words of consolation; the flood-gates were fairly down, and the whole tide of sorrow and anxiety so long pent up in the little heart had its way for the first and last time. But May could not be selfish, 'It is not your fault, Julia,' she said in remonstrance against her sister's self-reproach, 'it is only that I am weak and faithless; but oh, I cannot bear this long suspense.'

For Henry Alston's regiment had been in the first attack on the line of works at Petersburg, and as yet no tidings had come to tell of his safety.

Small comfort was there in anything that Julia could say, so long as there was no assurance that he was not lying among the dead, or suffering wounded far away

from the love that vainly longed to shelter him; but there was something soothing in the fond words, the caressing tenderness lavished upon her, and presently May grew calmer.

'There is uncle Arthur,' said Julia, starting up from her kneeling posture as the doctor's buggy drew up before the door. 'I won't let him come in; he can go up-stairs at once.

The two boys had been a little unwell with some slight childish ailment, and the doctor's daily visit was a matter of course; yet as Julia met him in the passage she felt intuitively that there was some other reason for his coming.

'Is mamma in her own room?' he asked in a grave tone, very unlike his usual cheerful greeting; and passing her he went up-stairs, while she returned to the parlour with a presentiment of coming evil that made her shrink from speaking to May. For a few moments she stood by the other window in silence, feeling with painful intensity the beating of her heart; then she started as the door opened, and turning to look at Aurora's face of sorrow, she knew that her fear was not unfounded.

'May, my darling,' said Mrs. Stanley going to her, and laying her hand upon the fair young head that was

bowed down in quiet weeping; 'this is sad news for you, but we must hope for the best.'

'Mamma, what is it?' And she sprang to her feet with a cry of agonized entreaty.

The telegram placed in her hand answered her:—

'Captain H. E. Alston was brought to this hospital to-day dangerously wounded. Desires his friends shall be informed.' Signed and dated in due form, Mount Pleasant Hospital, Washington, D.C.

An instantaneous change had passed over May in that one brief moment; there were no more tears, no signs of weakness. 'I must go to him,' she said in her own quiet tone of decision, as she laid the fatal paper on the table.

'Yes, my dear child,' Aurora answered as well as her tears would permit, 'you shall go. If the children were not ill I would go with you myself; but as I cannot leave them, uncle Arthur will take you to him.'

For a minute or two May was overcome as she turned to Dr. Bartlett and clasped his hand in both of hers, unable to speak a word of gratitude; then half inaudibly she murmured, 'How shall I thank you?'

'I could not do less for you, my child,' he answered gently; 'but we have no time to lose if we would catch the afternoon train. I must go home and make some

necessary arrangements; I will call for you at one o'clock. Julia, I will trust to you to have your sister ready.'

Poor Julia!—blinded with her tears, she seemed a poor dependence; the very sight of May's calm white face would bring on a fresh fit of crying as she tried to make herself useful in packing her sister's trunk, and May was permitted to do the greater part of it herself, Aurora thinking it the truest kindness to keep her occupied. When all was done, Julia slipped into the room alone, and taking out of a drawer a white muslin dress, folded it, and was putting it into the trunk when Mrs. Stanley came in. She started, as if detected in some impropriety, but when Aurora said, 'I don't think she will want that,' the explanation came, though not without tears—

'Mamma, we can't tell what will happen. I could not give her a black dress with her; but a day may come when she will not bear to look at any of those bright-coloured things—let it go.'

She hastily closed the trunk as May entered the room; and then looking round to see if anything had been omitted, she spied the little Prayer-book, Henry's gift, lying in its place on the table beside the bed, and would have found room for it; but May took it out of

her hand. 'Not there, Julia,' she said; 'you must let me have it with me.' And she placed it in her small travelling-bag, to be taken out again and again on the sorrowful journey that lay before her.

Nightfall found Aurora and Julia alone; while far away in the train that was speeding across the country May sat quietly by Dr. Bartlett's side, thankful that every moment was diminishing the distance, which yet seemed so interminably long. Should she be there in time, should she see him once more, catch the last sound of the dear voice, the last glance of the dark eyes that might even then be watching and wearying for her coming? 'Grant me so much, O my Father!' was her one prayer; beyond she asked no more, nor even dared to hope.

So patiently she wore away the hours, yielding a gentle assent to every suggestion of her kind guide; she would get out when the train stopped, go into the refreshment-room, take what she was bid with the obedience of a child; and when the doctor begged her to try to sleep, she laid her head upon the shawls he arranged for her comfort, and closed her eyes with an unquestioning submission that touched him very deeply. Clasped in her hand was the little Prayer-book; perhaps its very touch soothed her after some of its dear familiar

words had arisen from her heart; and lying there she slept as calmly as in her own home, and far more peacefully than the mother and sister she had left; while the good doctor congratulated himself upon having so reasonable a character to deal with. Come what might, and from the wording of the telegram he feared the worst, he knew that May would behave with the dignity and strength of a Christian woman—'little May,' who had seemed a very child but a few days ago. So childlike she looked as she lay asleep in the dim light of the railway car, that he shrank from the thought of the grievous desolation possibly before her. How hard it seemed that one young life should be cut down in an instant, and another blighted; and yet this was only one out of countless cases quite as sad. The great aggregate of misery caused by the war rose up before him, and his soul sickened at the thought; when would it end, and how?

Even then his reverie was broken by the sound of a low voice near him. Two passengers had just entered the car and had taken the nearest seat, a young man, and a woman, evidently his mother; she was sobbing violently, and he was trying to soothe her.

'Don't take on so, mother, don't,' he said gently; 'maybe he'll be better when we get there.'

But she only shook her head.

'No, no, Johnnie, they never send in time; he won't live to see us, I know he won't.'

May sat up, her face whiter than ever; she had heard every word, and turning round she laid a gentle hand on the poor woman's shoulder.

'Don't say that,' she said in her soft sweet voice, 'I think our errands are the same; and I know I could not live without the hope that I am not going in vain. It may be that God will be merciful to us both, if only we will trust Him.'

The other looked up.

'God bless you, my poor child,' she said; 'you are very young to have such a sorrow; but you know where to go for comfort. Pray for me that I may see my husband before he dies.'

'We will pray for each other,' said May.

CHAPTER XI.

LITTLE MAY IN A NEW LIGHT.

THE long weary journey was drawing to a close at last. On the morning of the third day the travellers saw the white dome of the Capitol standing out in the dazzling sunshine against the clear blue sky. Many a time had May looked forward to a visit to Washington, fancying the intense interest with which she would approach the central point of the national life, the thoughts and feelings that would almost overpower her there. Where were they now? All fled away—associations, memories, all were gone, the building before her was nothing but a landmark to show that the journey was ended, the desired haven almost attained.

A word of farewell and of sympathy to the poor woman whose heart she had cheered out of the midst of her own deep sorrow and anxiety, and leaning on Dr Bartlett's arm she passed through the crowded bustling

depôt. Soldiers here and there in their blue uniforms, a train of army-waggons rattling over the ill-paved streets, and presently a slow procession of ambulances carrying the wounded to the hospitals, brought home the reality of the war as it had never been felt in the quiet little western town.

Quite silent, May leaned back in the carriage during the long drive. Once the doctor put his head out of the window and asked the negro driver if he was sure he knew the way. 'Lor' bless you, yes, I knows it; but it's a long ways from here.'

So there was nothing for it but patience. Up and down through the dusty streets, past the straggling houses at last that marked the outskirts of the town, then slowly up a long hill crowned by rows of tents and long low hospital-buildings, clustered around a more substantial brick edifice; and pointing away to the right the driver said, 'That 's Mount Pleasant.'

Standing on an elevation where it could catch every breeze of heaven, and so insure the first requisite of fresh air, was the hospital, a large frame-building with a tower, from which floated the hospital flag. May looked once, then closed her eyes, and her whole soul went up in one unspeakable prayer.

The carriage stopped at the gate, where the sentinel

was pacing up and down. Dr. Bartlett sprang out, but stopped May as she would have followed.

'A moment, my dear child,' and she was alone.

One thing he could save her; he knew too well the fearful shock many a breaking heart had received when, coming from far-distant homes with the hope of cheering and soothing the last hours of husband or father, son or brother, one short terrible word had announced that all was over. If she must know that for her as for so many others it was too late, she should know it from his lips. Ages it seemed to May that he was absent, as she waited with clasped hands in an agony of suspense, but it was a very few minutes, only as many as would suffice for a hurried question at the entrance of Ward No. 5; a few calm words to one of the sufferers and a hasty return.

'Better, thank God! I have told him you are here.'

It was Dr. Bartlett, not May, who was trembling all over,—Dr. Bartlett, who could scarcely see to guide her steps to the proper spot.

As for May, like one in a dream she entered the hospital, and passed down the corridor; she did not tremble; she had no tears to shed. The long narrow ward, full of light and air, with its double row of white beds, its neatness and its order, she did not see,—she

only saw an eager face,—oh, so white and wan!—turned anxiously to the door, a pair of dark eyes that suddenly lighted at her coming, and as she knelt down beside the bed, unable to stand, she only heard a faint voice that said to her,—

'May, my own darling, Heaven bless you for coming to me!'

'Captain Alston was much better; the ball had been successfully extracted; it had not touched the lung; and though weak from the loss of blood, he would soon be all right again.' So said the surgeon, as he went his rounds; and then turning to Dr. Bartlett, he added confidentially, 'But he had a very narrow escape; a hair-breadth would have settled the matter otherwise.'

'How did he happen to be brought here?' asked the doctor.

'Through some abominable stupidity; but once at the door his only chance lay in taking him in; it does not do to stand on etiquette at such times; a man had better be saved as a private than killed as an officer.'

'Decidedly, and really it is a most comfortable place.'

'Oh! perfectly; as to that there is no preference; but I hope he will soon be well enough to be moved where his sister can have all the nursing of him.'

There was more of question than assertion in the

statement of the relationship; and Dr. Bartlett explained in a few words, thinking the time had gone by for any keeping of May's secret.

'Better!' What must he have been if he were better now, thought May, as she looked at him, scarcely daring to accept the comforting assurance given by the surgeon. So weak, so exhausted, so unlike his former self, he seemed to her to have the impress of death stamped upon his very countenance, and as she sat beside him hour after hour, she feared lest the slightest movement should break the last weak tie that bound him to life. He could not talk, save now and then in a few whispered words, but he lay with his eyes fixed upon her face, or slept with her hand clasped in his, evidently perfectly happy in her presence. Once he said 'Virginia;' and bending over him May told him of the last news received from his sister. 'Write to her,' he said, and May wrote, telling, as a matter of course, that she had come to him, and expressing all the officially-authorized hopefulness that yet she could not feel.

Dr. Bartlett was a little afraid that May would prove rebellious when called on to resign her post at evening; but he was mistaken; she never wasted her strength in idle struggles against the inevitable. As submissive as ever she bade Henry good-night, and went away, to

sleep and fit herself for the next day's duties; nor did she ever refuse to leave him at proper intervals to take the needful amount of food and exercise. Never in the whole course of his professional experience had Dr. Bartlett met with so reasonable a young woman, he said to himself, regarding her as a model for her sex. He was yet to discover how resolute May could be when she pleased, how determinedly she could carry out her own will and have her own way.

Henry Alston grew rapidly better; there could be no doubt of that. Every day there was a visible improvement. May was bringing him a new supply of life—he would tell her, with something of his old gaiety of manner.

And now May began to grow conscious of the presence of other people about them, pitiful and sympathizing toward the sufferers lying in the same ward, of whose very existence she had seemed unaware. Now and then she would shyly offer some little act of kindness, the smoothing of a pillow, the giving of a cup of cold water; shyly, yet with a certain dignity of manner at the same time. It was better than any picture Dr. Bartlett had ever seen to watch her so engaged, and to note the expression on Henry's face as his eyes followed her.

Evidently the two had been a puzzle at first to many

who saw them, for they both addressed Dr. Bartlett as 'Uncle Arthur,' yet were scarcely cousins, still less brother and sister; but the mystery soon unclosed, the key to it being found in every human heart, and the young officer and May were the objects of much kindly interest.

When a fortnight had passed, Dr. Bartlett began to think of returning home, but how to propose it he scarcely knew; for what could he do with May? To leave her was manifestly impossible; to take her from Henry seemed equally so. The difficulty solved itself, when one day a tall, broad-shouldered western man, with a most amiable expression of countenance, and a voice like the wind over the prairies, entered the hospital-ward, and asked for Captain Alston. He introduced himself, and Henry at once recognised an old and intimate friend of his father's, at whose house he had spent many a happy week in his boyhood during the summer vacations.

'But what are you doing here?' asked Mr. Ward. 'I thought no officers were sent here.'

The explanation was given.

'Ah, yes, very well; but your room is ready for you at my house, the first moment you are able to be moved. No protestations; have you I will and must, my dear

fellow. After all your father's kindness to me, I would be a brute and worse if I did not rejoice to do anything for his son; and my good wife is the quintessence of loyalty, and will be perfectly happy in having a soldier to pet and make much of.'

He would listen to no denial, but went away and brought his wife, a sweet, gentle, motherly woman of fifty, who took in the situation at a glance, and folding May in her arms, said, 'My love, you will come and stay with me till you see him quite well and strong.'

The whole matter was arranged with so much delicacy and true kindness that there was not a word to be said; and Dr. Bartlett saw his way clear to give his assent and take his departure, leaving all parties content.

All very well; but on the morning of the very day that Henry was to be moved, the fine plan was suddenly disarranged. Up to the hospital came Mr. Ward in dire consternation, to tell that his wife had been suddenly sent for to go to her father in Wisconsin; he had been taken with a stroke of paralysis, and she had started by the early train, in hope of seeing him alive.

'What *are* we to do?' he asked piteously of the doctor. 'If they were married, it would be plain sailing; but a young officer and his lady-love, with no one to matronize them but Rosalie--a good girl in her way,

and a capital housekeeper, but as wild as the wind, and only seventeen. You see it is simply impossible.'

Mr. Ward had his own ideas of propriety, and between them and his wish to be kind to Henry, he was in sore perplexity. Dr. Bartlett saw only one way out of the dilemma: May must go home with him, leaving Henry to be cared for by Mr. Ward, and to get a furlough and come to Westfield as soon as he was fit for the journey. So he went and laid the case before them, explaining Mr. Ward's perplexity, and his own regret that a promise to one of his old patients required him to be at home by a certain day; then he waited the reply, the ready acquiescence in his wishes, always heretofore given by May.

She was silent for a moment, and Henry only looked earnestly, searchingly into her face, half averted from him, and a little graver than was its wont.

'You see, my dear,' said the doctor rather nervously, 'I must be at home by Wednesday, and under the circumstances it is impossible for me to leave you here.'

Very softly May laid her hand in Henry's, very steadily she looked up—

'Uncle Arthur, his wife may remain with him,' she said.

Never had Dr. Bartlett been so completely taken by

surprise. This from May—from May, who, a month ago, could not have her engagement spoken of without blushing! He was absolutely stunned into silence. There she stood, the pretty head drooping a little, the fair childlike face faintly tinged with pink, the eyes cast down, but only to meet the gaze upturned to hers, 'wonderful for rapture,' as it was, and as the good doctor longed to say afterwards, when describing the scene, only that he was principled against quoting poetry.

There was no gainsaying the truth of May's assertion; his wife might stay with him most undoubtedly, and the two parties most nearly interested having given their own consent, a very short ceremony was all that was needed, but—

Dr. Bartlett saw a great many obstacles in the way. What would Mr. and Mrs. Stanley think? May was quite sure they would approve. He would telegraph to Aurora. 'No,' said May very decidedly. 'It is a mere mockery to ask advice when one's mind is made up,' and so, overruling all objections, she carried her point; at the same time assuring Dr. Bartlett that the responsibility rested solely with herself. Mr. Ward was delighted; it was the very thing he had wished, but had not dared to suggest, and he eagerly undertook to ar-

range all the preliminaries; but while he was talking with the doctor, Henry beckoned to May to come nearer, and as she bent down that no one else might hear the whispered words, he said—

'My darling, as it cannot be in church, as we would both have wished, may it not be here? The place is sacred by a thousand sweet memories; and I think too we may give a drop from our full cup of happiness to these poor fellows around us.'

The soft blue eyes were full of tears as she answered him, 'I should like it better than any other spot on earth.'

And so it was that the afternoon sun, shining in at the windows of Ward No. 5, lighted up a strange and unwonted scene. The exquisite neatness and order that reigned there were if possible more perfect than ever; the long table in the middle of the room was loaded with a profusion of wild-flowers from the woods; near the door was gathered a group of convalescents from the other wards, nurses and attendants, while the occupants of the double row of beds were raised up and supported in attitudes where they too could fix their eyes on the central figures.

Dressed for the first time in his uniform, and looking all the paler from the contrast, Henry Alston leaned

back upon the pillows, while beside him stood the fair young bride in the white muslin dress Julia had unwittingly provided. Behind her were Dr. Bartlett, Mr. Ward, and his daughter, where they could not shut out the scene from any of the eager spectators; and the clergyman, at the other side of the bed, began the service amidst the hushed silence.

Henry's voice distinct, though faint, and May's in its soft silvery clearness, fell upon every listening ear; the promises were made, the prayers offered, the blessing given; and as the last words were spoken, more than one brave fellow who had faced death on many a field covered his face to wipe away a tear, or checked the half-uttered sob he felt rising in his throat.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

WATCHING for Uncle Arthur in a fever of impatience—that was what Julia was doing four days later; now going to the window, now to the door, to look down the road and wonder what could be keeping him; and yet she expected no further news than the last letters from May had brought, she had no suspicion of the startling revelation in store for her. Aurora was much more patient, whiling away the time in a regular romp with her two boys, who were a never-failing resource and comfort on all occasions; and she was down on the floor, playing bo-peep round the corner of the sofa, when Julia exclaimed, 'There he is at last!' Out they both darted to welcome him, and to ask a dozen questions, waiting for an answer to none. It was not till the boys had been duly kissed and sent away to the nursery that Aurora expected to get any satisfactory account of the absent darling, and, truth to tell, the doctor seemed more reticent than was his wont.

But when the door was shut upon the two little noisy fellows, she seated herself for a good talk.

'Now tell us all about it, Arthur; you left dear May quite well, and safe and happy in the keeping of that good kind Mrs. Ward?'

'In better keeping still,' said the doctor; 'in that of her husband.'

'That is to be,' added Julia unsuspectingly.

'That *is*,' said the doctor authoritatively. 'There, Aurora, the secret is out; and if you want further confirmation of the fact, you will find it in that letter.'

'Uncle Arthur!' Julia fairly shrieked, 'what do you mean?'

But Aurora in silence and with her cheeks crimson, opened the letter and turned to the signature, 'May Alston.' It was quite enough, she understood in an instant. Aurora had her impulses like the rest of us, and the first (as in any mortal woman under the circumstances) was one of indignation; certainly she had deserved and expected something different from this at May's hands. But that mood lasted only till she could read the letter with its brief simple explanation.

'My darling little May!' she murmured, 'right, true-hearted, clear-sighted as ever. Read it, Julia, it is just like herself.'

'Then you absolve me?' asked the doctor, half amused at the celerity with which Aurora had gone over to the romantic side of the matter.

'Absolve you! I fancy your permission was never asked.'

'True there, Aurora; my gentle obedient little charge was suddenly transformed into the most determined resolute woman I ever met.'

'Of course; I always knew she could be that when she chose, and I was always sure she would only choose where she was clearly in the right.'

'O Aurora, Aurora, what a comfortable mamma you would seem to all the romantic young ladies of the present day! I see May was right not to be afraid of you. And now, what will her father say?'

'That he is proud of her, as he should be,' said Aurora unhesitatingly. 'What else could he say with that letter before him?'

Then Dr. Bartlett began and told the whole story from beginning to end, though often interrupted by Julia.

'To think of May being married, and I not there! And oh, mamma, to have all my fine plans shattered; not an orange-blossom, not even a bride's-cake!'

'After due deliberation,' said the doctor with pre-

tended gravity, 'we thought the happiness of two people worth even the sacrifice of those mighty adjuncts of an ordinary marriage!'

'And I had designed such an exquisite dress for her.'

'As to that, she could not have looked lovelier; I told you she was dressed in white, though what it was and where she got it I cannot tell.'

Light suddenly dawned upon Julia.

'Oh! Uncle Arthur! you don't mean to say she was married in that old washed muslin she wore all last summer?'

'I don't care if she and her grandmother before her had worn it for fifty summers; she looked all a bride should look,' declared the doctor stoutly.

'O dear, O dear! for the credit of the family I shall have to get married myself, and do the thing in decent style.'

'By all means,' laughed the doctor; 'we shall try to find some brave fellow in papa's regiment, who will have discretion enough to keep out of the hospitals.'

'Thank you; but I'm not one of the victims of the military fever; I don't think the army has absorbed all the goodness and worth in the country,' said Julia a little defiantly.

'Oh, you don't? I would dearly like to tell that to a

certain young friend of mine, who boasts no shoulder-straps.'

Julia's cheeks were like fire.

'You need tell it to no one, Uncle Arthur. It was said solely for your benefit, that you might not fancy I think the less of you for not volunteering your services as surgeon.'

She would have made her escape, but the doctor caught her and held her fast. 'O you monstrous little hypocrite!'

She made one struggle and was gone.

He threw himself back in his chair, laughing heartily.

'I would like to tell that to Hector M'Intyre,' he said.

'You need not trouble yourself,' Aurora replied; 'I think they understand each other.'

'You don't mean to say there is anything serious? What will their father say to me when he comes home and finds one daughter married, if not both? Nice guardianship I have exercised.'

Aurora laughed. 'You need not be afraid, Arthur. In Julia's case it will not come to that, while Hector has his present charge; indeed, I believe there has been nothing between them beyond a silent understanding, an unspoken avowal.'

'Aided and abetted by somebody who shall be nameless.'

'Don't tease me, Arthur; tell me more about May. Was she really so calm and self-possessed all the time?'

'Yes; during the ceremony she was evidently thinking far more of Henry than of herself, wishing to spare him all unnecessary excitement. When it was over the ward-master came to her and said that if it were not asking too much, some of the men would like to shake hands with her. I wish you could have seen her as she went the rounds of the ward, receiving their good wishes, their thanks, and blessings. Poor fellows, they were evidently touched by her readiness to give them pleasure. Henry was rather exhausted by the time he was laid down in the pretty room prepared for them at Mr. Ward's, and she sat by him till he fell asleep; then she slipped away, ran down to the parlour where I was waiting for her, threw herself into my arms and had a good cry.'

'Poor little darling; poor little May.'

'Ah, she was no longer poor little May when I left she was serenity itself, so calm and sweet and bright, and already wearing her new dignity so gracefully; really a model bride.'

'It is impossible to realize it; to fancy her actually Henry Alston's wife.'

'He was a wise fellow when he made choice of her; only wait till you see for yourself.'

But it was longer waiting than any of them anticipated. Henry regained his strength very rapidly; still, he had been necessarily absent from duty so long that he hesitated to ask for a furlough when he was well enough to travel, and May honoured his conscientious scruples. He was appointed to duty in Washington, to her intense delight and thankfulness, and there for the year after their marriage they remained, postponing for a time the intended visit home.

Certain as May had been of her father and mother approving of her decision, she was doubly happy when she received the assurance. Aurora's letter was overflowing with motherly affection; she would have done the very same thing, so she had not a word to say in remonstrance. Colonel Stanley wrote:—'My little girl, you have been as brave and true-hearted as I could have wished, and I don't know whether your husband or your father is most proud of you.' And Virginia began her letter thus:—'You are infinitely better than an angel, May; at least, no angel of whom I ever read would have behaved in a manner so wholly satisfactory.'

Julia was terribly disappointed about the postponement of the trip to Westfield; but as for May, it must be confessed that she was much too happy to care for anything else so long as she could have her husband with her, a state of mind her sister soon suspected, and silently resented. But the happy little bride knew nothing of this, and long before she saw Julia again, that young lady had attained to a more reasonable condition, and had ceased to feel aggrieved that home and friends and all the world had become as nothing to May in comparison with her husband. Hers was only the common experience of sisters and brothers, even of fathers and mothers, when some heart wholly their own from childhood wakes up to the reality of a deeper love, and deserts the old home for the new; the pang is inevitable, the sense of loss unavoidable; but Julia wisely held her peace, and made no complaint, even to Aurora. And so in due time matters righted themselves, and at last she even came to understand and sympathize with May's 'idolatry;' but that was not yet.

Meanwhile the bright little spirit extracted sunshine from everything; even the life in a boarding-house, where they removed as soon as Mr. Ward would permit them, was found to have a certain charm of novelty, and furnished topics for plenty of amusing comment in

May's letters home. Washington was full of interest for her, as soon as Henry was able to take her out and show her the lions; the summer did not pass without some small excitement from the last of the annual Confederate 'raids;' and the autumn brought a great joy, no less than a visit from her father, who was sent to the capital on business of importance. He managed to get leave of absence for a few days, and then came the question, 'Would May go home with him? Henry could easily spare her, and he would bring her back.'

'No, dear papa, I would rather not,' said May gently, and the wistful eyes turned to her husband forbade further mention of the matter. Any day he might be taken from her, she never forgot that, and so long as they could be together she would not leave him. So Colonel Stanley went home alone, and when he was there Aurora found no room in her heart to wish for May or anything else. Then he went back to his regiment, and but for the two bright, beautiful boys, with their merry ways and their joyous voices echoing through the old house on the hill, Aurora and Julia might have found it dreary enough during the following winter.

But in Washington the winter brought a number of new interests, though even May's loyalty was not proof

against the general dulness of the debates in Congress. She was forced to confess herself disappointed there, and at last she gave up her visits to the gallery of the House or Senate. But to the unsophisticated western girl a reception at the White House was a great affair, an introduction to the President an honour not to be lightly esteemed, and the opportunity of meeting the men who occupied the foremost places in the conflict, military and political, was not the less valued because so easily attained. Not that May entered much into the gaieties of Washington life; one reception or one party a week was quite enough for her; and she found her great happiness in the long quiet evenings spent alone with her husband, with no other society than that of some of their favourite books.

Soon after the beginning of the year, however, there began to creep into her letters little hints of a longing for Aurora's presence. 'Dear, dear mamma, what would I not give to have you beside me now?' or, 'I wish, oh! how I wish that I could see you!' Then at last an urgent entreaty that Aurora would come to her in the spring, followed by a beseeching letter from Henry. 'She is so young, dear mamma; and even I may not be with her. I dare not trust my darling to strangers.'

There was but one answer possible, and the motherly

heart had been yearning over the absent daughter long before the request was made.

'Come in time for the 4th of March,' May had written; 'I am sure you would like to see our good President renew the oath of office.'

So Aurora kissed and hugged her two babies, gave them into Julia's charge without a misgiving, though with a few natural tears, and went, arriving in Washington on the second day of March.

'Yes, it is the same little May,' was Aurora's first impression, as a pair of soft blue eyes sparkled with welcome, and she was held in a close embrace, with the same sweet voice murmuring, 'Dear, dearest mamma, how good and kind of you to come!' But before the evening was ended, she added, 'The same, yet not the same;' for it was no longer the child May, but the wife, with an indescribable change in air and manner, that touched Aurora, and yet made her smile as she noted it. The old shyness and bashfulness were gone, and in their stead there was a certain gentle dignity, very pretty to behold. How much there was to talk over, how many questions to ask about Julia, 'the darling boys,' Hector M'Intyre, and all other friends; even the cows and the chickens, and the plants which had been May's especial care. Then and there was produced a small tin box, in

which the kind and thoughtful mamma had brought some lovely flowers cut from her own plants, in proof of their flourishing condition. The quick blush of pleasure suffused the sweet face, and the bright eyes filled with tears; nothing could have given such delight, and it was pleasant to watch her as she touched them so lovingly, recognising each. 'This is from my own heliotrope; and oh, Henry, see,—this is a bud from your rose-bush, how lovely it is! and this is a bit of papa's myrtle.'

At last May bethought herself: 'Mamma, I am sure you are tired; come, I will take you to your room and make you comfortable.'

'That is reversing the order of things, my love; I thought I had come to take care of you.'

'Oh, so you shall after to-night; but come now.' And when they were in Aurora's room: 'Will you feel inclined to go to morning service at half-past seven to-morrow?'

'May!' exclaimed Aurora in consternation, 'you have not been getting up at that hour?'

'Yes, I have though, since Lent began; it does me no harm, mamma, but a great deal of good. Henry objected at first, but I told him I would lie down and rest after breakfast.'

Aurora shook her head. 'It is very evident you need some one to look after you.'

'Oh, mamma!' It was the new May, not the old, from whom came the indignant remonstrance; 'I am sure Henry is only too anxiously careful about me.'

'My dear child, I did not for an instant mean to reflect upon Henry; I know you could not be watched over with greater devotion; but, as it happens, he has had no vast amount of experience.'

May laughed and blushed, and peace was restored between them.

Aurora was scarcely awake the next morning, when her door opened and May appeared in bonnet and shawl.

'Oh, I am glad you are not up, mamma. I would not call you, for I wanted you to rest. You will go with us this evening.'

And away she went, having her own will, as she always did.

Nor could Aurora find it in her heart to interfere: the daily service was such comfort and delight to May, and she was really so sensible and prudent, so ready to resign any and every other enjoyment.

Henry was indefatigable in his chivalrous attentions to Aurora; he went about with her, showing her the

lions, and proving himself the best of guides, only apologizing now and then for tiring her by too hard a day's work, on the ground that he was liable to be ordered off any hour, and then she would have no one to go out with her. But Aurora was not easily tired, and was a most satisfactory person to guide, never failing to be interested and amused.

With Henry she stood, on the 4th of March, amidst the dense assembly that listened to the few remarkable words of the inaugural address, thrilled and touched beyond expression by their noble simplicity and faith. And in the evening she went to the last public reception of 'the good President,' to touch his hand and pass on in the crowded room: but never could she forget the deep tender pathos of the eyes that met her own for an instant, as she looked up in strangely mingled pain and reverence to the face so wearied and worn with the burden of a nation's care.

'What do you think of our President?' May asked in the morning.

'Think of him! O May, the whole of these four years' trouble and anguish seems written on his countenance; I felt as I looked at him that he had borne my sorrow and anxiety, and that of every heart which has suffered in the war. We may congratulate ourselves,

for who could fill his place? But to offer words of congratulation to him would be bitter irony; those who love him should rather weep that he has another four years of wearing anxiety and care before him.'

A fortnight later came the long-dreaded summons. Henry went home, entered the room where his wife and her mother were sitting, and going up to May laid a hand on each shoulder, bent his head and kissed her.

'My darling!' and there was no quiver in the voice, 'I am ordered to the front; will you and mamma get my things ready?'

Every particle of colour fled from May's face, but she only asked 'When?'

'I must leave to-morrow morning early.'

She took it very quietly, too quietly, Aurora thought, fearing the consequences of such repression of feeling; but she was relieved upon coming out of church after the evening service, to see May hastily draw down her veil to hide the traces of her tears. Very early that night Aurora bade Henry good-bye, and went to her own room, and when she saw May again he was gone.

A brave little spirit it was most undoubtedly, and wonderfully did she bear up; but on the following Sunday afternoon, as Aurora was sitting reading, she was accosted thus (May was lying on the sofa with a

book in her hand, but she had not turned a leaf for more than half-an-hour)—

'Mamma, do you think it would be wrong to pray that if anything happens to Henry I may be taken too?'

Such a wistful look out of the blue eyes, such an earnestness in the soft voice.

'Could you wish your baby to be motherless as well as fatherless? O May!'

'I did not mean that, mamma,' she said quickly, the colour starting to her pale face, 'I meant that we should both go to him at once; it would be so much easier.'

'My dear child, that should be left entirely to the will of God; but I hope and believe nothing will happen to Henry; and one thing I know, for his sake his little wife should not even think such thoughts.'

'For his sake.' She had touched the right chord there; thenceforward May was most resolutely cheerful.

March ended, April began, and suddenly came the news, long waited for, unexpected at last, startling the usually quiet unimpressible town into a *furore* of excitement. Guns were firing, bells ringing, flags fluttering from every house; at the corners of the streets men were shaking hands, almost embracing each other in the exuberance of their joy; the newsboys were rushing hither and thither shouting the glorious tidings,

and vainly striving to supply the insatiable demand for 'extras.' From house to house flew the magic words, 'Richmond is taken!' At last; at last!

'I am so glad that Henry was there!' was May's first exclamation, forgetful of all possible danger, thinking only of his share in the triumphant achievement of the long-delayed result.

And Henry was there. At the earliest possible moment came a letter giving a full account of the entrance of the troops into the city, where he remained with the army of occupation. But all the pride of the soldier's wife, all the gratified national feeling, were as nothing to the joy that sprang up in May's heart as she came to Henry's closing sentence:—

'I shall try very hard to be sent as bearer of despatches, or in any other capacity, if only I may get back to Washington.'

Meanwhile she was most thankful that all anxiety for him was ended, that he was not with the main body of the army, compelled day after day by a defeated yet desperate and still defiant foe, to fight a series of battles whose only possible result was the sacrifice of precious lives.

Would the carnage never end? Had not blood enough been shed?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPRING OF 1865.

IT was five o'clock in the morning of the 10th of April. Aurora had sent away the nurse to take her needful rest; and by the fire she sat holding in her arms May's little daughter, whose life as yet was numbered only by hours. From the bed came the sound of the quiet regular breathing which showed that the young mother had fallen asleep, and Aurora stirred neither hand nor foot, so fearful was she of disturbing the happy slumberer. She was thinking of Henry, of her own darlings at home, of their father far away, still exposed to the perils of the war, when suddenly through the quiet morning air resounded the deep loud report of a cannon, shaking the house and rattling the windows. She held her breath to listen; again and again came the guns in quick succession; and then a voice, weak, but eager with excitement, exclaimed —

'O mamma, what is it? Don't you think Lee has surrendered?'

'It must be, it can be nothing else; but, dearest, I am so sorry to have you disturbed.'

'Oh, don't say so, the sound of these guns is better than a week's sleep.'

'I am not sure of that; they might have waited a little, and not have roused the whole town at such an unreasonable hour.'

'What a speech from a soldier's wife!' said May, a little mischievously; 'and to a soldier's wife besides.'

'Soldiers' wives are mortal women, and you are my first care. Try to compose yourself, dear, and you may possibly sleep again.'

'With that sound in my ears? I would not lose it for the world.'

'May, May!' said Aurora, in real distress, 'you must not talk and excite yourself so.'

'Well, I won't then; I will be still and count the guns.'

And she did.

'Is that all?' she said, when they ceased at length.

'All? I hope so, I am sure.'

'O mamma, it is the sweetest music I have heard for many a day. They might have kept it up a little longer; there is no need to save the powder now.'

'You incorrigibly naughty child! What am I to do to keep you quiet?'

'Just bring me my baby for a moment.' And as Aurora laid the little creature beside her, she said, 'Do you know it, baby dear? I wish you did. Papa is safe, quite safe, now.' Then startled at her own transfer of the title, she looked up to see how it had struck Aurora. 'And my own papa,' she added,—'you don't think there will be any more fighting?'

'I hope not,' said Aurora; 'but, May, I will not have you speak another word; I had no idea you could be so naughty.'

'O baby, baby,' whispered May, 'you don't know what a terrible ogre of a grandmamma you have got!'

Henry was as good as his word; on Thursday he arrived in Washington on important business; very resolutely he bent his steps to the War Department first of all, delivered his despatches, received his orders, and then—

Aurora was standing by the window when she caught a glimpse of the familiar figure; and hastily snatching up the baby, she laid it in May's arms, whispered Henry has come,' turned the astonished nurse into the next room, followed her and shut the door, just in time.

There are meetings too sacred to be intruded upon by human eyes; Aurora fancied this was one of them.

She was recalled very soon; and the same evening there was held a grand consultation over the baby's name.

'I think it should be May,' said Aurora, 'for she is going to be her mamma in miniature.'

But the mamma would not hear of such a thing; and had her own proposal, which came out at last—

'Victoria,—that is the name for her, Henry, don't you see?'

'Our little republican calling her daughter for a queen!' laughed Aurora.

'Mamma, you know better; to be sure the best of queens has made the name honourable; but I want baby to have it in remembrance of her birthday and the victory of the Republic.'

Henry assented, as he probably would have done if May had wished to name the child 'Boadicea' or 'Bellona.'

'Victoria Alston,' said Aurora; 'too many *A*'s, May, they do not go well together.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Henry; 'Virginia has never

found any inconvenience from the same thing; besides, we can have a middle name. Victoria Grant—how would that do?'

May fairly clapped her hands.

'And moreover,' she said demurely, 'our daughter may not always remain Victoria Alston—I hope she will not.'

'That looks like a hand for a wedding-ring,' said Henry, lifting up the tiny pink fingers and kissing them. 'O May, you are early developing the tendencies of a match-making mamma.'

'And if I am,' she said, with a pretty faint blush, 'is it not the very highest compliment I can pay my husband?'

The following day was Good Friday; it came and passed with its own sacred services, its deep and holy associations.

On Saturday morning Aurora was just putting on her bonnet to go to the last early service, when there was a tap at her door.

She opened it, and Henry stood before her with such a face of woe that her heart died within her, and she could not utter a word.

'It is nothing to us personally more than to the whole people,' he said, answering her look; 'but the worst of

all calamities has fallen upon us—the President has been assassinated.'

Who shall describe the darkness of that terrible day, with its lowering sky and the sobbing rain that fell at intervals; the houses but yesterday fluttering with flags, now draped in mourning; the unspeakable sorrow bowing the hearts of a nation as the heart of one man? Let silence fall over it; it is still too near to be spoken of with calmness by any who shared its loss and desolation. Aurora was one of those who looked upon that never-to-be-forgotten scene, when on a fair spring day, under a cloudless sky, with the glorious sunshine lighting up everything, and life starting anew from the long sleep of winter; amid the tolling of bells, the firing of minute-guns, the hushed silence of a mighty multitude of mourners, there began that wonderful funeral procession, which was to wind its way across half a continent. Through crowded cities, quiet country towns and villages it passed; and the bowed heads, the tears of millions, attested the love that the simple noble heart had won; until they laid him down to rest in his quiet grave, near the home that he had left to give himself a sacrifice for his country.

Then came the tidings of Johnston's surrender to Sherman; and the war was ended. With thankfulness,

but with little exultation, the long-hoped-for day was hailed by hearts too chastened and subdued for another outburst of ecstatic joy. The end was gained for which no sacrifice had been deemed too great, but the victors in the strife were standing over a new-made grave, with arms reversed and lowered banners, while from the stricken heart of the nation arose the words—

'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise, for thy loving mercy and for thy truth's sake.'

'You will stay and see the grand review, mamma? Oh, I would not miss it for anything.'

But Aurora shook her head.

'I want to see my babies, May.'

The young mother looked down to her own baby on her knee, and said nothing more.

'Besides,' said Aurora, 'you know my hero is not to be there.'

Colonel Stanley had not been with Sherman in his wonderful march to the sea; he had been left behind to fill a less brilliant but scarcely unimportant post, holding one of the points which it was necessary to keep in possession. Such had been his fortune all through the

war, faithfully, conscientiously fulfilling his duties, now and then through great personal danger, but in a quiet way; never having any opportunity of distinguishing himself in the sight of the world, gaining no laurels, making himself no name. How many such men were there, who were content to remain in the background unnoticed, unadmired, if only they might do their part for the salvation of their country; how many to whom is due a debt of gratitude scarcely less than that so well bestowed upon the great generals who led the armies on to victory!

Aurora was quite content; it was better so, more in keeping with her husband's whole character. She wanted no praise for him, fame could not have made him greater in her eyes.

She went home, to find Julia sadly tyrannized over by the two boys, and to remonstrate with her for having spoiled them more in two months than their mamma had done in three years. May remained in Washington and saw the grand review. It was well worth seeing, whether one's own special hero were there or not.

Nature was propitious; the 23d of May dawned clear, bright, and beautiful, after a rain which had effectually laid the dust and purified and cleared the atmosphere. For once the capital city put on its best

appearance, determined to do honour to the returning heroes.

Down the broad avenue for hour after hour poured the 'mighty river of marching men,' the army of the Potomac. In no holiday attire, like the first recruits in the beginning of the war, but just as they had come from the terrible battle-fields, the fatal trenches, the deadly swamps;—only now the officers' horses were loaded with wreaths of flowers; garlands were twined round the silent mouths of the guns; whole companies, even regiments there were, where every man had a rose-bud in his cap, or fixed upon his bayonet, the offerings of the school children assembled on the broad steps and portico of the Capitol.

Eloquent witnesses to the work that had been done, and to the manner of the doing of it, were the torn and tattered flags, 'the banners ragged in a hundred fights;' blackened and begrimed with smoke, rent to atoms, in some instances scarcely a vestige remaining on the staff, yet carried how proudly, with what a sense of exultation, in the face of the assembled people!

Cheer after cheer rent the air, there was waving of handkerchiefs, scattering of bouquets; yet the glad excitement was unconsciously toned down and subdued, never rising to the point of wild and tumultuous enthu-

siasm. And it was well; for alas! how many had gone forth with that army who should return no more; how many a place was vacant in the ranks, how many in the homes throughout the length and breadth of the land; while uppermost in every heart was the thought of him who should have been the first to welcome the returning army, whose true great heart would have rejoiced in that day with a joy and a pride above all others. No need of the badge of mourning worn upon every arm, fluttering from every flag-staff, to remind the nation that its father and its head was gone.

With what eager eyes did May watch for her husband's regiment (he was a major now); it came at last, and as he looked up, met her gaze with his own bright smile, and took off his cap to bow to her, the little head went down upon her hands, and she saw no more for a time.

'Are you not tired, my little wife? Can you stand another day of such excitement?' Henry asked that evening.

And she made answer: 'I would not lose the sight of one of the brave noble fellows for the world.'

Henry was with her the next day, when the 'Western army,' Sherman's boys, passed in review in like manner; the men who had made that daring marvellous march,

who had fought those countless battles. In unbroken column, with steady front, unfaltering step, they came on, and the spectators ceased to wonder that they had accomplished whatever they undertook. Perhaps they awakened a little more enthusiasm than the army of the Potomac, for this was their first appearance in the capital; and there had been a certain romance and mystery about their movements during the time when, cut off from all communication with the rest of the country, they had been pushing their way through the very heart of the Confederacy. So the interest never failed, the welcoming shouts never faltered through the six hours of the second day, and until the last of the two hundred thousand men had marched by, and the grand review was over.

Once during that morning, as Major Alston turned to his wife with some passing remark, he found her in tears.

'What is it, May? Are you thinking, little tender heart, of those who have not returned to share this day's triumph?'

May shook her head.

'No, they have not failed of their reward; and those who loved them have the best of all comfort. I was thinking, Henry, of the unhappy Southern people who

have given their best and dearest in an unrighteous cause, and for whom there comes no day of recompense, no glad and triumphant welcome offered or received, nothing but blank desolation, loss, and unavailing regret.'

In answer, Henry took out of his pocket-book the beautiful and touching lines written by Frances Ann Kemble on the 'Hour of Victory,' and gave them to May to read; but he could scarcely have thought by doing so to wipe away her tears.

There was a little pleasant rivalry between the two armies, and in the street car, as they were going home, Henry and May were the auditors of an animated discussion.

'Sherman's boys beat the army of the Potomac at marching,' said one speaker.

'Well they might,' retorted another, 'after marching all up and down the whole country, they might do that well if nothing else; the army of the Potomac has had something else to do besides practising its steps.'

'The ladies are the best judges,' said a soldier of that Western army who was present; and turning to May he asked very respectfully, 'Which did you think made the finest show, miss?'

May answered quite simply: 'I am sure I cannot

tell, I never thought of it in that light, and I could not make any comparison, for my father fought in the one army, my husband in the other.'

As the car stopped just then, she rose and laid her hand on Henry's arm with a most undoubted air of possession. The soldier who had spoken to her sprang to his feet, his hat off in an instant--

'I am sure I beg ten thousand pardons, madam; but I think we are all answered.'

May's pretty blushing smile satisfied him as much as her husband's half-amused assurance that no apology was necessary.

'For really, May,' he said to her afterwards, 'in that hat you look uncommonly like a little girl I used to know in Westfield; you are practising an imposition on the public.'

'What shall I do?' she asked in mock distress; 'will you buy me a wig and spectacles?'

'Yes, I think I will; but I will take some years to decide about them.'

CHAPTER XIV.

FREE AT LAST.

THE first bit of news which greeted Aurora on her return home was that Mrs. M'Intyre had gone to New York to pay a visit to her sister; and as the visit was destined to affect the fortunes of several people, we may go back a little and see how it was brought about.

Early in April, Hector M'Intyre, going home one evening, heard an unfamiliar voice in conversation with his stepmother.

The sound of his footstep in the passage evidently interrupted the speaker rather hastily, for when he entered the parlour Mrs. M'Intyre was standing by the centre-table, professedly engaged in examining a book with which she was quite familiar, but with the embarrassed air of a person trying to seem at ease.

'Oh, Hector, are you there? Let me introduce you to my cousin, Mr. John Harrington.'

Hector had never heard of Mr. John Harrington, but

he welcomed him at once as Mrs. M'Intyre's cousin, asked when he had arrived in Westfield, insisted upon sending to the hotel for his carpet-bag and valise, and invited him to remain as long as he found it convenient.

The new-comer was a tall, dark, sun-burnt man of about thirty-five, with a frank, pleasant manner and expression; yet there was something in the lines about the mouth and eyes which seemed to say that he had suffered, and borne his suffering in silence. He gave an account of himself at once: he had been for years absent from the country, had just returned from China, and longing for the sight of a friendly face, he had come to Westfield to see his cousin. All very satisfactory, but why had Mrs. M'Intyre, usually so fond of talking about her own relations, never happened to mention this one?

He proved a very agreeable companion, for he had roamed all over the world, and during his travels he had kept his eyes and ears open,—by no means an invariable rule with travellers. Hector was very sorry when he took his departure at the end of a week; but it was not until he was gone that the extraordinary change in Mrs. M'Intyre became apparent. What had come over her to make her so unlike her former self, —so gentle and subdued, so quiet and thoughtful?

A fortnight passed, and then she announced her determination to go and see her sister in New York, taking her little girls with her. As she had never spoken of this sister in very affectionate terms, it was scarcely uncharitable to suspect the existence of some other attraction drawing her to the east.

When she had been gone a month, Hector received a letter of such unusual length that he was quite sure it must contain important intelligence, his stepmother's notes usually consisting of about a dozen lines of the merest commonplace. He did not open it till he was alone at home in the evening. It ran thus:—

'Dear Hector,—I write to announce my engagement to my cousin, John Harrington. It is possible that you may be taken by surprise, and I feel it to be due to you no less than to myself that I shall make some explanation.

'We were brought up together, and I never remember the time when John did not call me his "little wife," when I did not accept the title as the prophecy of my future. So it was no matter of surprise when we were formally engaged; I was sixteen at the time, he a few years older. How we were separated would take too long to tell; there were those who hesitated at nothing

to accomplish their own selfish ends, and by a long series of falsehoods and deceptions I was induced to break off the engagement. He left the country, and from that day I neither saw nor heard of him until he came to Westfield. But never for one instant did I cease to love him; in my innermost heart I have been true to him through all these miserable years.

'I married my first husband in sheer desperation, determined to conquer all show of feeling. My two little girls were born, and then their father died. I was left a widow with a mere pittance to live upon. I struggled on for three years; then I met Mr. M'Intyre; he offered me a home, independence, the protection of his name and hearth. You shall not blame me, Hector; I was miserably poor, and the war was threatening the South with desolation; for the sake of my children I married him, and I have never repented it.

'He too was taken, and now John Harrington has returned, the only man I ever loved; he has been true to me as I to him through all his absence. The past is blotted out, a happy future lies before us, in which we may forget all that we have suffered. You will congratulate me, for you have always been kind, and I am sure you desire my happiness.'

Then came certain small details and numerous direc-

tions, for she did not mean to return to Westfield; but with them we have nothing to do.

What a letter! what a revelation! As Hector read it the cold perspiration started from his brow, and he almost groaned in the bitterness of his spirit. To the pure and upright soul of the young man it seemed that a woman confessing that she had married a man she did not love was writing herself down as a sinner of the vilest class. Yet there were the words in Mrs. M'Intyre's own hand; and she had taken the place of his sainted mother, she had been his honoured father's wife! No earthly consideration could have tempted him to show that letter to any human being; there were shame and degradation in the very thought: he noted down the date and any directions for the disposal of her property, then went into the kitchen, which was fortunately empty, and put it in the fire. He watched until the flame consumed it, and as the last vestige disappeared he threw back his head and drew a long breath, like a man set free from the burden of a heavy chain.

'I have had a letter from Mrs. M'Intyre with some rather startling news,' he said to Mrs. Stanley when he saw her again; 'she is to be married in July.'

'Indeed! Who is the happy man?'

'Mr. John Harrington, a cousin of her own who has lately returned from China,—a millionnaire, it is said.'

'Ah!' Aurora's tone was quite unmistakable.

'You must not misjudge her, Mrs. Stanley,' said Hector quickly; 'this time, I believe, she marries for love. It was an old attachment, the fortune is merely a happy accident.'

'And when does she return?'

'Not at all. She tells me they are going to Europe for a year, and she is very busy making ready. I am to send everything she left behind.'

Aurora smiled at the idea of Hector packing his stepmother's trunks.

'Can I help you?' she asked.

'Oh, thank you; but I daresay Betty can do everything.'

'Betty! My dear Hector, she is a very good cook, but I am sure she is as capable of delivering a lecture on the solar system as of arranging Mrs. M'Intyre's things to her satisfaction. Let me come over to-morrow and see what I can do.'

So on the morrow Aurora got ready. Would Julia go with her?

No; Julia would not touch any of Mrs. M'Intyre's belongings with a ten-foot pole. An equal distance she

seemed disposed to keep from Hector himself; a fact which puzzled Aurora a little, but it was easy of explanation.

Mrs. M'Intyre's presence in Hector's home had been an impassable barrier between him and Julia; and standing on either side of it they had been friends, dear and intimate friends, but nothing more. Now the barrier was down and there must be a change of relations. Julia felt this, knew it intuitively; and accordingly avoided Hector in the most dexterous manner possible. But Hector was neither distressed nor deceived; very patiently he bided his time, and at last he gained his reward.

Mrs. M'Intyre passed away from Westfield, as she passes from our pages, to enter upon a new life. The one virtue she had manifested, the poor attempt at constancy, warped and distorted as it was, until it would have been difficult to distinguish it from vice, might there expand and prove the beginning of better things. It is charitable to hope and to believe that it will; for as there is no human being who is wholly evil, so is there none in whom there may not be found the possibility of a nobler life.

Home at last came May with her husband and her baby. A glad welcome awaited her; and it was a happy

family circle gathered in the old house on the hill to await the coming of the father, who would make its joy complete.

Henry was, of course, a hero in the community of Westfield; but at home the baby threw both of her young parents into the shade, and ruled the household in a manner worthy of her name. Julia would scarcely let her be out of her sight, and the two small uncles were ready to lay all their possessions at her feet, only distressed by her indifference to the charms of cake and candy, apples and balls. A very lovely baby she was, with May's violet eyes, and a tiny rosebud mouth, always ready to smile; the best of babies too, never crying except under unbearable provocation. And baby's mamma was very happy and very proud of her new treasure. But she had a confession to make, and could not be quite content till it was made.

Aurora came into the room one morning when May was sitting in a low rocking-chair, putting the little Victoria to sleep. She looked up with a thoughtful, grave expression on her face.

'Mamma, do you remember something naughty I once said to you in this room?'

'No, dear, I am sure I do not.'

'But I do; I have thought of it very often of late, and wanted to tell you. I said I was giving up more than you when papa and Henry went into the army; I did not know then, but now I am afraid I could not let my baby's father go.' And clasping the little creature closer to her heart, she looked up tearfully to Aurora.

But Aurora smiled. 'I could have told you there was a difference then. I am glad, very glad, May, that you have discovered it for yourself.'

Colonel Stanley was coming home; his regiment was to come up the Mississippi, and had embarked at Memphis. A few more days and he would be with his wife and children, to leave them no more. Aurora could scarcely walk quietly about the house; her heart was dancing with delight as she went up and down, putting everything in order, that when he came she might have nothing to do but sit and sun herself in the joy of his presence. There was not a happier woman in the length and breadth of the land than she thought herself, as she went to the nursery to take a good-night look at her sleeping children. There they lay in the warm summer night, their cheeks rosy with health, their brown curls clustering over their fair broad brows, their rounded limbs reposing in the beautiful unconscious grace of childhood. Her two lovely boys! what

pride and joy their father would take in watching them day by day! Long she stood over them; then, with a kiss and a murmured blessing to each, she turned away.

It was scarcely a prayer that rose from her heart that night; there seemed to be room there for nothing but thanksgiving, gratitude for all her overflowing happiness, for the mercy and love which had guarded her home from the desolation that had come to so many others. And, counting the days and hours until her husband's return, she lay down and slept, slept calmly and unconsciously as any of us can, even while our best and dearest, the beloved of our souls, may be exposed to the most fearful peril, and all our own future is hanging in the balance.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FINAL PERIL—HOME AND PEACE.

THE same night saw three persons walking up and down the deck of a heavily-laden Mississippi steamer,—Colonel Stanley, Archibald Dubois, and with them Virginia Alston. She had finished her hospital work, and was now returning home to rest, and to mature her plans for devoting her life and energies to some labour of love similar to that in which she had been engaged. They had been talking over the experiences of the last four years, and Archibald had been laughingly lamenting his own and Colonel Stanley's sad fate, inasmuch as they were going back without even a scratch to show that they had been in the war.

After a pause in the conversation, he remarked—'What a surly-looking fellow that man is at the wheel!'

'Yes,' said Virginia; 'if there is anything in physiognomy, he is scarcely a person to be trusted.'

'Come, come,' said Colonel Stanley, 'you must not speak so of my friend and ally. We had a long talk last night; and what would you say if I should tell you that he let me take his place for an hour?'

'Only that I am thankful our lives did not pay the forfeit,' said Virginia.

'Oh, no fear of that; he was with me all the time. The truth is, I had some small experience of a sailor's life in my boyhood, and I was anxious to see how much I remembered of what I picked up then. No one can tell when he may find a use for some little knowledge of any kind.'

'But what an example!' laughed Archibald; 'our Colonel setting at nought all rules of discipline and order!'

'My dear fellow, the words and the thing they signify are equally unknown here. Every man does what is right in his own eyes. After what I have seen on this steamboat, I no longer wonder at the number of accidents on our western rivers; the only matter of surprise is that there are not many more.'

'Pleasant food for thought to-night!' remarked Virginia.

'If I had fancied you a nervous young lady, I should not have said it. But I must put myself right with

you, Dubois. Before getting my lesson in navigation, I asked permission of the officer on watch, and was evidently considered a great fool for my pains.'

'Well, if you repeat it,' said Virginia, 'please remember that some of us have a slight prejudice in favour of dying quietly at home in our beds. Good night; I shall certainly dream of snags and collisions, and all sorts of horrors.'

The two gentlemen continued their walk; it was a lovely moonlight night, and there was every temptation to remain where they were. They might have paced back and forth probably for half an hour, when suddenly there was a glare of light upon the water, and in tones that might well strike terror to the stoutest heart, came up from below the appalling cry, 'Fire! fire!'

No words can paint the scene that followed; but its wild confusion and dismay were conquered by a few brave spirits. There was no need for the captain's entreaty, 'For heaven's sake, Colonel Stanley, get your men to work,' for already, at the word of command, they were forming into line to do battle with the devouring flames. Of incalculable value then were the habits of subordination and obedience, the result of four years' military discipline. The officers of the steamer knew, and Colonel Stanley knew, the

most fearful danger that threatened them, from a quantity of gunpowder on board sufficient to blow the vessel and her living freight to atoms; but the men who stood in their places, and passed the fire-buckets, and poured out the water where it seemed needless, knew nothing save that they were obeying the orders which had been given them. 'Theirs not to question why; theirs but to do or die'—as faithfully, as bravely there as on the field of battle.

The burning steamer was in the middle of the broad river; on either side steep clay bluffs rose perpendicularly from the water's edge. A little farther up the stream she might be run ashore, and in reaching that point lay their only hope of safety. But could they reach it in time? It was possible, barely possible, if every man were true to his duty. And inch by inch they fought with the raging fire as it roared and blazed in defiance of their efforts. Slowly, but surely, it was gaining ground,—hindered, but not subdued; unconquered, and unconquerable!

Oh, the agony of those moments to all who were compelled inactively to look on, pleading with God to interpose and save them from a horrible death!

Still the steamer sped upon her way, shortening the distance between her and the shore. Nearer and

nearer now; a good swimmer might have ventured to plunge overboard. Every eye was fixed upon the blessed haven, every nerve was strained to the uttermost, every heart was beating high with hope, when in an instant, without warning, without reason, the vessel swerved from her direct course, slowly swinging round with the current of the river. Through the dense cloud of smoke now enveloping the upper deck, in tones of thunder came the captain's voice, shouting his orders to the man at the wheel, but there was no response.

Virginia Alston was at Colonel Stanley's side. 'Merciful God!' she exclaimed; 'that man has deserted his post!'

She had seen a crouching figure pass swiftly by her. She had heard the muttered words, 'My life's as precious as any man's'—followed by a splash in the water below, and looking up she saw what had happened.

Quick as lightning Colonel Stanley turned:—

'Dubois, take my place,—keep the men to their duty;' and he was gone.

His hand was upon the wheel, and instantly obeying her rudder, the steamer turned back again upon her course. No one knew, no one suspected. And

there he stood, unspeakably thankful for the power of understanding and obeying the orders shouted over they little knew to whom.

But could he hold out, saving the lives of others even at the sacrifice of his own? Thick clouds of smoke poured up around him. He could not see,—he could scarcely breathe. The heat was maddening,—his brain seemed on fire. And through it all came the thought of home—of wife and children—lost to him now when he had seen them just within his grasp.

'Help me, O my God!' was his one agonized cry. Then memory seemed to desert him. He only knew that he was there to guide the vessel to the shore. He only cared to hear and obey the words for which he listened. Calmly, firmly he held the wheel, and heeded not the flames hissing beneath and behind him. Suddenly, from a thousand voices a glad triumphant shout fell upon his ear; but it seemed to come from a far far distance, and to die away in a faint prolonged echo. After that he knew no more.

They were saved! The steamer touched the shore; she was made fast, and every living soul passed in safety over her side.

Knowing what must follow, the captain gave orders to cut the ropes, and let her drift out with the current.

In that instant Virginia Alston sprang forward, her face blanched with terror—

'Where is Colonel Stanley? Archibald, where is Colonel Stanley?'

Where indeed! No one knew; no one had seen him.

'He must be in the steamer. God forbid that we should leave him there to die! Who will come with me?'

And with three companions, Archibald Dubois turned again to face the death they had just escaped. A hundred voices shouted to them to return: 'It is madness,—it is suicide. Come back! come back!'

They heeded not. Resolutely they fought their way through the fire and smoke, guided by Archibald, until they reached the wheel-house. There lay Colonel Stanley. Dead! They could not tell; there was no time to question.

In their arms they lifted him, and turned to retrace their steps. But the deck was yielding beneath their feet; the flames were hissing in their ears, leaping up on every side; the black smoke blinded and bewildered them.

How it was they never knew, but feeling their way step by step, led by something higher than their own instinct, they emerged at length from that prison-house

of fire; and as the eager eyes watching from the shore caught sight of their precious burden, a wild tumultuous cheer rent the very heavens, uniting all hearts and voices in one outburst of joy.

They laid him on the grass and bathed his face with water, while Virginia bent over him in an agony of suspense.

The blazing steamer floated out into the stream; a few moments and there came a terrific explosion shaking the solid earth, and the air was darkened with the flying fragments; then dead silence, and as they looked again, there was nothing afloat on the face of the broad river.

Slowly Colonel Stanley opened his eyes and looked around.

'All safe, Virginia?'

'All,' and she burst into tears.

'Thank God,' he said fervently; then raising himself up, 'Dubois, are you there?'

'I am; is there anything I can do?'

'Is there a telegraphic office near?'

'I think so; shall I go for you?'

'Yes; send a message to my wife, signed with my name, telling her that we are safe. I will be all right soon, and I would like her to know.'

'Where is Maxwell, the fellow that did our telegraphing for us?' said Archibald Dubois, approaching a group of the men.

'Here; what is it?'

'Come with me and I'll tell you: Any dozen of you too who are ready for an adventure.'

Even at such a time there were not wanting volunteers to respond to that call; and the party set off, guided by the telegraph wire. A walk of ten minutes brought them to a small straggling village consisting of a few tumble-down frame houses, inhabited by the families of the men engaged in cutting wood for the passing steamers.

The telegraph office was easily found, and Archibald presented himself and his message to the clerk, with the request that it might be forwarded immediately.

But that functionary declared the thing was impossible; it could not be done. The wires were engaged; he was just about to begin to send the despatch of the Associated Press, whose agent was even then in the inner room. The public must be served first; afterwards he would be very happy to transmit any private message.

'It will cause a very short delay,' said Archibald.

'One message might; but if I send yours, a dozen

others will come with the same demand, and I cannot make any distinction.'

'Listen to me for a moment if you please,' said Archibald, in a tone implying a determination to be listened to, whether his auditor pleased or not. 'But for Colonel Stanley every soul of us might have perished; we owe our lives to his resolute heroism. I put it to you as a gentleman whether the general public or his wife has the best right to receive the first news.'

'Oh, if that is it—I did not understand—I will see.'

And after some little delay the message was duly forwarded; Archibald waiting very patiently to see it done before he would leave.

Then he turned to the agent of the Associated Press, who had just come from the back room where he had been writing his despatch.

'Will you oblige me with a sight of the telegram you are about to send?'

The very coolness of the request insured the reply that came—

'Oh, certainly, I have no objection to let you see it.'

Archibald read it.

'Ah! As I was on the spot you will perhaps allow me to make a slight correction.'

He pointed to the last paragraph, 'Colonel Stanley, whose gallant conduct contributed to the safety of all on board, is said to be missing.'

'You may strike that out, my friend; he is no more missing than you or I, seeing that I have just come from him to send a message to his wife. I am happy to say not a hair of his head was injured, though he was very nearly suffocated by the smoke, and had a narrow escape.'

The paragraph was accordingly suppressed, but rather unwillingly; it had been such a striking conclusion to the story, that without it half the effect was lost.

'Well, Dubois, what if that fellow had refused to send the Colonel's message?'

'What if he had? I think you know quite as much about the telegraph as he does, Maxwell; and the rest of us could have insured you against any interference from either of our friends there, or a dozen others like them. That was my little plan if he had made any difficulty.'

'Some of the rest of us has got wives as might like to hear from us,' grumbled one of the men. 'I don't see why we hadn't as good a right to send a message too.'

'My good fellow,' replied Archibald, 'whenever you

do what Colonel Stanley has done for us this night, if you want your wife informed, just call upon me; I am at your service.'

The next day the newspapers were full of the story. Colonel Stanley's name was in every mouth; his heroism magnified by every tongue. The whole community of Westfield was elate with pride, for had they not a share in his glory?

Strange to say, his wife was the only person who was not carried away by the general enthusiasm. What had passed in her own room over that telegram no one ever knew; but outwardly she never lost her composure for an instant.

When people came to congratulate her she received them kindly, and was grateful so long as they sympathized with her gladness in her husband's safety; but as soon as they began to express their wondering admiration of his conduct, something in her manner silenced them, they scarcely knew why. She did not seem eager to listen to his praises, and they found in Julia and May much more gracious auditors.

'I don't understand it, Henry,' said May, 'one would almost think that mamma does not care.'

Henry looked up with an amused smile.

'You stupid little woman! I thought you had more

penetration. Is it possible that you do not understand?'

'I only understand that if it had been you I should have been very proud, even more so than I am now.'

'And very much surprised — overwhelmed with astonishment?'

'No,' said May, 'I will not say that.'

'Then don't you see how it is with mamma? It seems to me the highest compliment a man can receive when his wife accepts his noblest deeds as a matter of course from him. Depend upon it, May, she would have been as enthusiastic as anybody had the hero been some one else.'

May said nothing; this was a new light, and her husband added presently—

'What was the poem you were reading the other day and admiring so much?

> "If you see I see far better
> And I will not seem to care
> For a stranger's prompt assurance—"'

'Oh,' said May, 'if that is it. And it must be; yes, I understand now,—she will not be moved by the estimate of other people, knowing and appreciating him so much more truly herself.'

Mrs. Bartlett came to Aurora in a very penitent

frame of mind, seized with a sudden and violent admiration of her brother-in-law.

'My dear Aurora, you must forgive me all my blindness in the past; you can afford to be generous now that your hour of triumph has come, and you can be so justly proud of your husband.'

Aurora looked her sister-in-law calmly in the face—

'I am no more proud of him now, Harriet, than I have been every day for the last five years. It needed no accident to prove to me the true greatness of my husband's character.'

So quietly she accepted all the enthusiasm expended upon him; and when at last the days of waiting were ended, when he reached his home, eagerly welcomed by the whole excited population, she was pleased no doubt by the ovation in his honour, but she was not overwhelmed.

Not till she was alone with him, the outer world excluded whose opinion she valued so little, did the full heart overflow; but what she said to him in that moment of supreme joy would have been said all the same had he returned to her unhonoured and unknown.

Poor little Emily Osborne came the next day to see Colonel Stanley; she looked up into his face for an instant, then her voice faltered, her lip quivered, and

she turned away. As if she had been one of his own daughters he took her in his arms and kissed her, then sitting down beside her he talked to her of her brother.

Archibald Dubois could not carry out that programme exactly ; but he had been poor Fred's inseparable companion, and it was not strange that Emily should find a charm in his society, while he was not the man to be insensible to the pleasure of having those dove-like eyes lifted to his, as the colour came and went over the sweet face.

Virginia Alston looked on and smiled. She had great hopes of Archie, so she said. After his experience of a life with a definite aim and object, she was sure he could never again be satisfied with his old way of living at random, and he would be all the better of a wife.

In the long summer evenings a happy circle assembled in the porch of the old house on the hill. The war was ended, the sacrifice had not been made in vain, the hearts which had suffered had gained their reward.

With his two boys climbing on his knees, and Aurora sitting beside him, Hugh Stanley would look out over his fields and meadows lying in the peaceful light of the setting sun, and ask himself if the four years of the war had not been a frightful dream.

Now and then, however, he and Henry Alston would

recall the days happily gone by, and 'fight their battles o'er again,' while Aurora and Virginia, Julia and May, listened with unwearied interest. Or with Hector M'Intyre they would discuss the future of the country, the momentous questions to be decided in calmer days, and by the same men who had vindicated the authority of a free government, and hopefully anticipate a glorious destiny for the nation, delivered from its old curse of slavery.

Peaceful happy hours were those, such as the summer of 1865 brought to many a home.

There came a day in autumn, a lovely Indian summer day, when there was a grand marriage in St. John's Church, Westfield. The bride 'in glass of satin, and glimmer of pearls,' was all that a bride should be; flowers decked the chancel-rail, there were orange-blossoms in abundance, and the whole community was assembled to look on. Julia thus fulfilled her promise, and established the credit of the family.

After the ceremony the company adjourned to Mr. Stanley's house, where the happy pair were duly congratulated, the bride's-cake was duly cut, the bridal presents were duly displayed and admired.

How did it happen that amongst these last so many were duplicated? Ah, that was Julia's secret, reli-

giously kept until May asked the question. Then came the explanation. 'You innocent little thing! Did you really never suspect? They are yours, May; you gave no one the opportunity of bestowing so much as a tea-spoon upon you on your own wedding-day, so you must just consent to accept your presents on mine. Go now and tell Henry.'

May's face was a study.

Mr. and Mrs. Hector M'Intyre were off at last upon their marriage-tour, and the guests were gone, Dr. Bartlett and his wife alone remaining.

'I must congratulate you, Aurora,' said the latter; 'everything went off so well; there certainly never was a more beautiful wedding.'

'I beg your pardon,' said the doctor; 'but you must make one exception.'

'What was that?' asked Aurora; 'your own?'

'No indeed; I could not judge of it, being myself a chief actor. I mean a wedding in the ward of a certain hospital, where I had the honour of giving away the bride.'

May's cheeks were glowing in an instant, and Henry Alston sprang up and seized the doctor's hand.

'It was the best day's work you ever did in your life, Uncle Arthur; and the present company will bear me witness that nothing further can be said.'

So we take leave of them, the men and women whose steps we have followed through some of the eventful days of the last few years.

The vast army has melted away; the heroes of a hundred battle-fields have returned to the desk and the counting-house, to the plough and to the loom; for the wives and mothers the long hours of suspense and anxiety are ended. But the four years have made their mark.

Those who were called to stand for a little while in the heat of the furnace go back again to the common routine of ordinary life; yet they cannot go unchanged.

Where the fine gold existed it has surely been purified; and we may trust to the coming days to prove that with the nation, as with the individual soul, the chastening of the Lord bringeth forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

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